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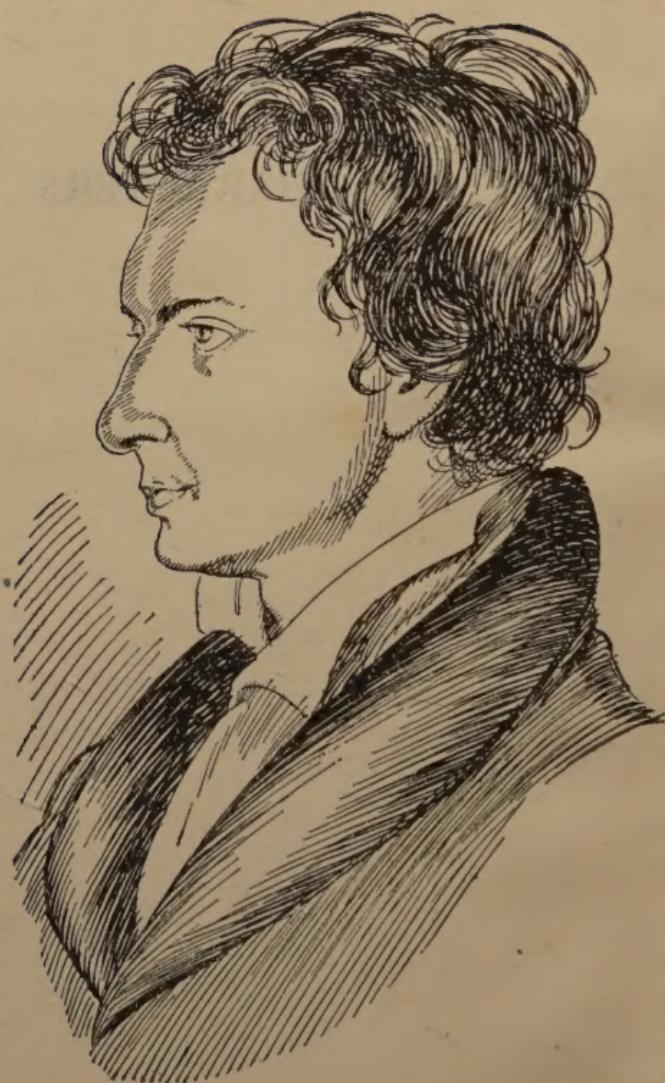
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ESSAYS AND CHARACTERS



WILLIAM HAZLITT

ESSAYS & CHARACTERS

by

WILLIAM HAZLITT

Edited by
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William Hazlitt was born at Maidstone on April 10, 1778. He studied divinity at the Unitarian College, Hackney, and studied art in Paris before he turned to writing. He died in London on September 18, 1830.

His works include "The Round Table" (1817), "The English Stage" (1818), "Lectures on the English Poets" (1818), "Lectures on the English Comic Writers" (1819), "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth" (1820), "Table Talk" (1821, 1822), "Characteristics" (1823), "Liber Amoris" (1823), "Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries in England" (1824), "The Spirit of the Age" (1825), "The Plain Speaker" (1826), "A Life of Napoleon Buonaparte" (1828, 1830), and three posthumous collections edited by his son, William Carew Hazlitt: "Literary Remains" (1836), "Sketches and Essays" (1839), "Winterslow" (1850).

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*This facsimile title-page is taken from the
first volume of Hazlitt's essays.*

THE
ROUND TABLE:
A COLLECTION OF
ESSAYS
ON
LITERATURE, MEN, AND MANNERS,

By WILLIAM HAZLITT.

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ESSAYS AND CHARACTERS

THE FIGHT

“ —The *fight*, the *fight’s* the thing,
Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.”

Where there’s a will, there’s a way.—I said so to myself, as I walked down Chancery-lane, about half-past six o’clock on Monday the 10th of December, to inquire at Jack Randall’s where the fight the next day was to be ; and I found “ the proverb ” nothing “ musty ” in the present instance. I was determined to see this fight, come what would, and see it I did, in great style. It was my *first fight*, yet it more than answered my expectations. Ladies ! it is to you I dedicate this description ; nor let it seem out of character for the fair to notice the exploits of the brave. Courage and modesty are the old English virtues ; and may they never look cold and askance on one another ! Think, ye fairest of the fair, loveliest of the lovely kind, ye practisers of soft enchantment, how many more ye kill with poisoned baits than ever fell in the ring ; and listen with subdued air and without shuddering, to a tale tragic only in appearance, and sacred to the FANCY !

I was going down Chancery-lane, thinking to ask at

Jack Randall's where the fight was to be, when looking through the glass-door of the *Hole in the Wall*, I heard a gentleman asking the same question at Mrs. Randall, as the author of *Waverley* would express it. Now Mrs. Randall stood answering the gentleman's question, with the authenticity of the lady of the Champion of the Light Weights. Thinks I, I'll wait till this person comes out, and learn from him how it is. For to say a truth, I was not fond of going into this house of call for heroes and philosophers, ever since the owner of it (for Jack is no gentleman) threatened once upon a time to kick me out of doors for wanting a mutton-chop at his hospitable board, when the conqueror in thirteen battles was more full of *blue ruin* than of good manners. I was the more mortified at this repulse, inasmuch as I had heard Mr. James Simpkins, hosier in the Strand, one day when the character of the *Hole in the Wall* was brought in question, observe—" The house is a very good house, and the company quite genteel : I have been there myself ! " Remembering this unkind treatment of mine host, to which mine hostess was also a party, and not wishing to put her in unquiet thoughts at a time jubilant like the present, I waited at the door, when, who should issue forth but my friend Joe Toms, and turning suddenly up Chancery-lane with that quick jerk and impatient stride which distinguishes a lover of the FANCY, I said, " I'll be hanged if that fellow is not going to the fight, and is on his way to get me to go with him." So it proved in effect, and we agreed to adjourn to my lodgings to discuss measures with that cordiality which makes old friends like new, and new friends like old, on great occasions.

We are cold to others only when we are dull in ourselves, and have neither thoughts nor feelings to impart to them. Give a man a topic in his head, a throb of pleasure in his heart, and he will be glad to share it with the first person he meets. Toms and I, though we seldom meet, were an *alter idem* on this memorable occasion, and had not an idea that we did not candidly impart ; and “ so carelessly did we fleet the time,” that I wish no better, when there is another fight, than to have him for a companion on my journey down, and to return with my friend Jack Pigott, talking of what was to happen or of what did happen, with a noble subject always at hand, and liberty to digress to others whenever they offered. Indeed, on my repeating the lines from Spenser in an involuntary fit of enthusiasm :

“ What more felicity can fall to creature,
Than to enjoy delight with liberty ? ”

my last-named ingenious friend stopped me by saying that this, translated into the vulgate, meant “ *Going to see a fight.* ”

Joe Toms and I could not settle about the method of going down. He said there was a caravan, he understood, to start from Tom Belcher’s at two, which would go there *right out* and back again the next day. Now I never travel all night, and said I should get a cast to Newbury by one of the mails. Joe swore the thing was impossible, and I could only answer that I had made up my mind to it. In short, he seemed to me to waver, said he only came to see if I was going, had letters to write,

a cause coming on the day after, and faintly said at parting (for I was bent on setting out that moment) —“ Well, we meet at Philippi ! ” I made the best of my way to Piccadilly. The mail coach stand was bare. “ They are all gone,” said I —“ this is always the way with me—in the instant I lose the future—if I had not stayed to pour out that last cup of tea, I should have been just in time ”—and cursing my folly and ill-luck together, without inquiring at the coach-office whether the mails were gone or not, I walked on in despite, and to punish my own dilatoriness and want of determination. At any rate, I would not turn back : I might get to Hounslow, or perhaps farther, to be on my road the next morning. I passed Hyde Park Corner (my Rubicon), and trusted to fortune. Suddenly I heard the clattering of a Brentford stage, and the fight rushed full upon my fancy. I argued (not unwisely) that even a Brentford coachman was better company than my own thoughts (such as they were just then), and at his invitation mounted the box with him. I immediately stated my case to him—namely, my quarrel with myself for missing the Bath or Bristol mail, and my determination to get on in consequence as well as I could, without any disparagement or insulting comparison between longer or shorter stages. It is a maxim with me that stage-coaches, and consequently stage-coachmen, are respectable in proportion to the distance they have to travel : so I said nothing on that subject to my Brentford friend. Any incipient tendency to an abstract proposition, or (as he might have construed it) to a personal reflection of this kind, was however nipped in the bud ; for I had no sooner declared

indignantly that I had missed the mails, than he flatly denied that they were gone along, and lo ! at the instant three of them drove by in rapid, provoking, orderly succession, as if they would devour the ground before them. Here again I seemed in the contradictory situation of the man in Dryden who exclaims :

“ I follow Fate, which does too hard pursue ! ”

If I had stopped to inquire at the White Horse Cellar, which would not have taken me a minute, I should now have been driving down the road in all the dignified unconcern and *ideal* perfection of mechanical conveyance. The Bath mail I had set my mind upon, and I had missed it, as I missed every thing else, by my own absurdity, in putting the will for the deed, and aiming at ends without employing means. “ Sir,” said he of the Brentford, “ the Bath mail will be up presently, my brother-in-law drives it, and I will engage to stop him if there is a place empty.” I almost doubted my good genius ; but, sure enough, up it drove like lightning, and stopped directly at the call of the Brentford Jehu. I would not have believed this possible, but the brother-in-law of a mail-coach driver is himself no mean man. I was transferred without loss of time from the top of one coach to that of the other, desired the guard to pay my fare to the Brentford coachman for me as I had no change, was accommodated with a great coat, put up my umbrella to keep off a drizzling mist, and we began to cut through the air like an arrow. The mile-stones disappeared one after another, the rain kept off ; Tom Turtle, the trainer,

sat before me on the coach-box, with whom I exchanged civilities as a gentleman going to the fight ; the passion that had transported me an hour before was subdued to pensive regret and conjectural musing on the next day's battle ; I was promised a place inside at Reading, and upon the whole, I thought myself a lucky fellow. Such is the force of imagination ! On the outside of any other coach on the 10th of December, with a Scotch mist drizzling through the cloudy moonlight air, I should have been cold, comfortless, impatient, and, no doubt, wet through ; but seated on the Royal mail, I felt warm and comfortable, the air did me good, the ride did me good, I was pleased with the progress we had made, and confident that all would go well through the journey. When I got inside at Reading, I found Turtle and a stout valetudinarian, whose costume bespoke him one of the FANCY, and who had risen from a three months' sick bed to get into the mail to see the fight. They were intimate, and we fell into a lively discourse. My friend the trainer was confined in his topics to fighting dogs and men, to bears and badgers ; beyond this he was " quite chap-fallen," had not a word to throw at a dog, or indeed very wisely fell asleep, when any other game was started. The whole art of training (I, however, learnt from him) consists in two things, exercise and abstinence, abstinence and exercise, repeated alternately and without end. A yolk of an egg with a spoonful of rum in it is the first thing in a morning, and then a walk of six miles till breakfast. This meal consists of a plentiful supply of tea and toast and beefsteaks. Then another six or seven miles till dinner-time, and another supply of solid beef

or mutton with a pint of porter, and perhaps, at the utmost, a couple of glasses of sherry. Martin trains on water, but this increases his infirmity on another very dangerous side. The Gas-man takes now and then a chirping glass (under the rose) to console him, during a six weeks' probation, for the absence of Mrs. Hickman —an agreeable woman, with (I understand) a pretty fortune of two hundred pounds. How matter presses on me ! What stubborn things are facts ! How inexhaustible is nature and art ! “ It is well,” as I once heard Mr. Richmond observe, “ to see a variety.” He was speaking of cock-fighting as an edifying spectacle. I cannot deny but that one learns more of what *is* (I did not say of what *ought to be*) in this desultory mode of practical study, than from reading the same book twice over, even though it should be a moral treatise. Where was I ? I was sitting at dinner with the candidate for the honours of the ring, “ where good digestion waits on appetite, and health on both.” Then follows an hour of social chat and native glee ; and afterwards, to another breathing over heathy hill or dale. Back to supper, and then to bed, and up by six again—Our hero

“ Follows so the ever-running sun
With profitable *ardour* ”—

to the day that brings him victory or defeat in the green fairy circle. Is not this life more sweet than mine ? I was going to say ; but I will not libel any life by comparing it to mine, which is (at the date of these presents) bitter as coloquintida and the dregs of aconitum !

The invalid in the Bath mail soared a pitch above the trainer, and did not sleep so sound, because he had " more figures and more fantasies." We talked the hours away merrily. He had faith in surgery, for he had had three ribs set right, that had been broken in a *turn-up* at Belcher's, but thought physicians old women, for they had no antidote in their catalogue for brandy. An indigestion is an excellent common-place for two people that never met before. By way of ingratiating myself, I told him the story of my doctor, who, on my earnestly representing to him that I thought his regimen had done me harm, assured me that the whole pharmacopeia contained nothing comparable to the prescription he had given me ; and, as a proof of its undoubted efficacy, said that, " he had had one gentleman with my complaint under his hands for the last fifteen years." This anecdote made my companion shake the rough sides of his three great coats with boisterous laughter ; and Turtle, starting out of his sleep, swore he knew how the fight would go, for he had had a dream about it. Sure enough the rascal told us how the three first rounds went off, but " his dream," like others, " denoted a foregone conclusion." He knew his men. The moon now rose in silver state, and I ventured, with some hesitation, to point out this object of placid beauty, with the blue serene beyond, to the man of science, to which his ear he " seriously inclined," the more as it gave promise *d'un beau jour* for the morrow, and showed the ring undrenched by envious showers, arrayed in sunny smiles. Just then, all going on well, I thought on my friend Toms, whom I had left behind, and said innocently, " There was

a blockhead of a fellow I left in town, who said there was no possibility of getting down by the mail, and talked of going by a caravan from Belcher's at two in the morning, after he had written some letters." "Why," said he of the lapells, "I should not wonder if that was the very person we saw running about like mad from one coach-door to another, and asking if any one had seen a friend of his, a gentleman going to the fight, whom he had missed stupidly enough by staying to write a note." "Pray, Sir," said my fellow-traveller, "had he a plaid cloak on?"—"Why, no," said I, "not at the time I left him, but he very well might afterwards, for he offered to lend me one." The plaid-cloak and the letter decided the thing. Joe, sure enough, was in the Bristol mail, which preceded us by about fifty yards. This was droll enough. We had now but a few miles to our place of destination, and the first thing I did on alighting at Newbury, both coaches stopping at the same time, was to call out, "Pray, is there a gentleman in that mail of the name of Toms?" "No," said Joe, borrowing something of the vein of Gilpin, "for I have just got out." "Well!" says he, "this is lucky; but you don't know how vexed I was to miss you; for," added he, lowering his voice, "do you know when I left you I went to Belcher's to ask about the caravan, and Mrs. Belcher said very obligingly she couldn't tell about that, but there were two gentlemen who had taken places by the mail and were gone on in a landau, and she could frank us. It's a pity I didn't meet with you; we could then have got down for nothing. But *mum's the word.*" It's the devil for any one to tell me a secret, for it's sure to come

out in print. I do not care so much to gratify a friend, but the public ear is too great a temptation to me.

Our present business was to get beds and a supper at an inn ; but this was no easy task. The public-houses were full, and where you saw a light at a private house, and people poking their heads out of the casement to see what was going on, they instantly put them in and shut the window, the moment you seemed advancing with a suspicious overture for accommodation. Our guard and coachman thundered away at the outer gate of the Crown for some time without effect—such was the greater noise within ;—and when the doors were unbarred, and we got admittance, we found a party assembled in the kitchen round a good hospitable fire, some sleeping, others drinking, others talking on politics and on the fight. A tall English yeoman (something like Matthews in the face, and quite as great a wag)

“ A lusty man to ben an abbot able,”—

was making such a prodigious noise about rent and taxes, and the price of corn now and formerly, that he had prevented us from being heard at the gate. The first thing I heard him say was to a shuffling fellow who wanted to be off a bet for a shilling glass of brandy and water—“ Confound it, man, don’t be *insipid* ! ” Thinks I, that is a good phrase. It was a good omen. He kept it up so all night, nor flinched with the approach of morning. He was a fine fellow, with sense, wit, and spirit, a hearty body and a joyous mind, free-spoken, frank, convivial—one of that true English breed that went

with Harry the Fifth to the siege of Harfleur—"standing like greyhounds in the slips," &c. We ordered tea and eggs (beds were soon found to be out of the question) and this fellow's conversation was *sauce piquante*. It did one's heart good to see him brandish his oaken towel and to hear him talk. He made mince-meat of a drunken, stupid, red-faced, quarrelsome, *frowsy* farmer, whose nose "he moralised into a thousand similes," making it out a firebrand like Bardolph's. "I'll tell you what, my friend," says he, "the landlady has only to keep you here to save fire and candle. If one was to touch your nose, it would go off like a piece of charcoal." At this the other only grinned like an idiot, the sole variety in his purple face being his little peering grey eyes and yellow teeth; called for another glass, swore he would not stand it; and after many attempts to provoke his humorous antagonist to single combat, which the other turned off (after working him up to a ludicrous pitch of choler) with great adroitness, he fell quietly asleep with a glass of liquor in his hand, which he could not lift to his head. His laughing persecutor made a speech over him, and turning to the opposite side of the room, where they were all sleeping in the midst of this "loud and furious fun," said, "There's a scene, by G—d, for Hogarth to paint. I think he and Shakespear were our two best men at copying life." This confirmed me in my good opinion of him. Hogarth, Shakespear, and Nature, were just enough for him (indeed for any man) to know. I said, "You read Cobbett, don't you? At least," says I, "you talk just as well as he writes." He seemed to doubt this. But I said, "We have an hour to spare:

if you'll get pen, ink, and paper, and keep on talking, I'll write down what you say ; and if it doesn't make a capital Political Register, I'll forfeit my head. You have kept me alive to-night, however. I don't know what I should have done without you." He did not dislike this view of the thing, nor my asking if he was not about the size of Jem Belcher ; and told me soon afterwards, in the confidence of friendship, that " the circumstance which had given him nearly the greatest concern in his life, was Cribb's beating Jem after he had lost his eye by racket-playing."—The morning dawns ; that dim but yet clear light appears, which weighs like solid bars of metal on the sleepless eyelids ; the guests drop down from their chambers one by one—but it was too late to think of going to bed now (the clock was on the stroke of seven), we had nothing for it but to find a barber's (the pole that glittered in the morning sun lighted us to his shop), and then a nine miles' march to Hungerford. The day was fine, the sky was blue, the mists were retiring from the marshy ground, the path was tolerably dry, the sitting-up all night had not done us much harm—at least the cause was good ; we talked of this and that with amicable difference, roving and sipping of many subjects, but still invariably we returned to the fight. At length, a mile to the left of Hungerford, on a gentle eminence, we saw the ring surrounded by covered carts, gigs, and carriages, of which hundreds had passed us on the road ; Toms gave a youthful shout, and we hastened down a narrow lane to the scene of action.

Reader, have you ever seen a fight ? If not, you have

a pleasure to come, at least if it is a fight like that between the Gas-man and Bill Neate. The crowd was very great when we arrived on the spot ; open carriages were coming up, with streamers flying and music playing, and the country-people were pouring in over hedge and ditch in all directions, to see their hero beat or be beaten. The odds were still on Gas, but only about five to four. Gully had been down to try Neate, and had backed him considerably, which was a damper to the sanguine confidence of the adverse party. About two hundred thousand pounds were pending. The Gas says, he has lost 3000*l.* which were promised him by different gentlemen if he had won. He had presumed too much on himself, which had made others presume on him. This spirited and formidable young fellow seems to have taken for his motto the old maxim, that "there are three things necessary to success in life—*Impudence! Impudence! Impudence!* " It is so in matters of opinion, but not in the FANCY, which is the most practical of all things, though even here confidence is half the battle, but only half. Our friend had vapoured and swaggered too much, as if he wanted to grin and bully his adversary out of the fight. "Alas ! the Bristol man was not so tamed !"— "This is *the grave-digger*" (would Tom Hickman exclaim in the moments of intoxication from gin and success, shewing his tremendous right hand), "this will send many of them to their long homes ; I haven't done with them yet !" Why should he—though he had licked four of the best men within the hour, yet why should he threaten to inflict dishonourable chastisement on my old master Richmond, a veteran going off the stage, and

who has borne his sable honours meekly ? Magnanimity, my dear Tom, and bravery, should be inseparable. Or why should he go up to his antagonist, the first time he ever saw him at the Fives Court, and measuring him from head to foot with a glance of contempt, as Achilles surveyed Hector, say to him, “ What, are you Bill Neate ? I’ll knock more blood out of that great carcase of thine, this day fortnight, than you ever knock’d out of a bullock’s ! ” It was not manly, ’twas not fighter-like. If he was sure of the victory (as he was not), the less said about it the better. Modesty should accompany the FANCY as its shadow. The best men were always the best behaved. Jem Belcher, the Game Chicken (before whom the Gas-man could not have lived) were civil, silent men. So is Cribb, so is Tom Belcher, the most elegant of sparrings, and not a man for every one to take by the nose. I enlarged on this topic in the mail (while Turtle was asleep), and said very wisely (as I thought) that impertinence was a part of no profession. A boxer was bound to beat his man, but not to thrust his fist, either actually or by implication, in every one’s face. Even a highwayman, in the way of trade, may blow out your brains, but if he uses foul language at the same time, I should say he was no gentleman. A boxer, I would infer, need not be a blackguard or a coxcomb, more than another. Perhaps I press this point too much on a fallen man—Mr. Thomas Hickman has by this time learnt that first of all lessons, “ That man was made to mourn.” He has lost nothing by the late fight but his presumption ; and that every man may do as well without ! By an over-display of this quality, however, the public had

been prejudiced against him, and the *knowing-ones* were taken in. Few but those who had bet on him wished Gas to win. With my own prepossessions on the subject, the result of the 11th of December appeared to me as fine a piece of poetical justice as I had ever witnessed. The difference of weight between the two combatants (14 stone to 12) was nothing to the sporting men. Great, heavy, clumsy, long-armed Bill Neate kicked the beam in the scale of the Gas-man's vanity. The amateurs were frightened at his big words, and thought that they would make up for the difference of six feet and five feet nine. Truly, the FANCY are not men of imagination. They judge of what has been, and cannot conceive of any thing that is to be. The Gas-man had won hitherto ; therefore he must beat a man half as big again as himself—and that to a certainty. Besides, there are as many feuds, factions, prejudices, pedantic notions in the FANCY as in the state or in the schools. Mr. Gully is almost the only cool, sensible man among them, who exercises an unbiassed discretion, and is not a slave to his passions in these matters. But enough of reflections, and to our tale. The day, as I have said, was fine for a December morning. The grass was wet, and the ground miry, and ploughed up with multitudinous feet, except that, within the ring itself, there was a spot of virgin-green closed in and unprofaned by vulgar tread, that shone with dazzling brightness in the mid-day sun. For it was now noon, and we had an hour to wait. This is the trying time. It is then the heart sickens, as you think what the two champions are about, and how short a time will determine their fate. After the first

blow is struck, there is no opportunity for nervous apprehensions; you are swallowed up in the immediate interest of the scene—but :

“ Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream.”

I found it so as I felt the sun’s rays clinging to my back, and saw the white wintry clouds sink below the verge of the horizon. “ So,” I thought, “ my fairest hopes have faded from my sight!—so will the Gas-man’s glory, or that of his adversary, vanish in an hour.” The *swells* were parading in their white box-coats, the outer ring was cleared with some bruises on the heads and shins of the rustic assembly (for the *cockneys* had been distanced by the sixty-six miles); the time drew near, I had got a good stand; a bustle, a buzz, ran through the crowd, and from the opposite side entered Neate, between his second and bottle-holder. He rolled along, swathed in his loose great coat, his knock-knees bending under his huge bulk; and, with a modest cheerful air, threw his hat into the ring. He then just looked round, and began quietly to undress; when from the other side there was a similar rush and an opening made, and the Gas-man came forward with a conscious air of anticipated triumph, too much like the cock-of-the-walk. He strutted about more than became a hero, sucked oranges with a supercilious air, and threw away the skin with a toss of his head, and went up and looked at Neate, which was an act of supererogation. The only sensible thing he did

was, as he strode away from the modern Ajax, to fling out his arms, as if he wanted to try whether they would do their work that day. By this time they had stripped, and presented a strong contrast in appearance. If Neate was like Ajax, "with Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear" the pugilistic reputation of all Bristol, Hickman might be compared to Diomed, light, vigorous, elastic, and his back glistened in the sun, as he moved about, like a panther's hide. There was now a dead pause—attention was awe-struck. Who at that moment, big with a great event, did not draw his breath short—did not feel his heart throb? All was ready. They tossed up for the sun, and the Gas-man won. They were led up to the *scratch*—shook hands, and went at it.

In the first round every one thought it was all over. After making play a short time, the Gas-man flew at his adversary like a tiger, struck five blows in as many seconds, three first, and then following him as he staggered back, two more, right and left, and down he fell, a mighty ruin. There was a shout, and I said, "There is no standing this." Neate seemed like a lifeless lump of flesh and bone, round which the Gas-man's blows played with the rapidity of electricity or lightning, and you imagined he would only be lifted up to be knocked down again. It was as if Hickman held a sword or a fire in that right hand of his, and directed it against an unarmed body. They met again, and Neate seemed, not cowed, but particularly cautious. I saw his teeth clenched together and his brows knit close against the sun. He held out both his arms at full length straight before him,

like two sledge-hammers, and raised his left an inch or two higher. The Gas-man could not get over this guard—they struck mutually and fell, but without advantage on either side. It was the same in the next round ; but the balance of power was thus restored—the fate of the battle was suspended. No one could tell how it would end. This was the only moment in which opinion was divided ; for, in the next, the Gas-man aiming a mortal blow at his adversary's neck, with his right hand, and failing from the length he had to reach, the other returned it with his left at full swing, planted a tremendous blow on his cheek-bone and eyebrow, and made a red ruin of that side of his face. The Gas-man went down, and there was another shout—a roar of triumph as the waves of fortune rolled tumultuously from side to side. This was a settler. Hickman got up, and “grinned horrible a ghastly smile,” yet he was evidently dashed in his opinion of himself ; it was the first time he had ever been so punished ; all one side of his face was perfect scarlet, and his right eye was closed in dingy blackness, as he advanced to the fight, less confident, but still determined. After one or two rounds, not receiving another such remembrancer, he rallied and went at it with his former impetuosity. But in vain. His strength had been weakened—his blows could not tell at such a distance—he was obliged to fling himself at his adversary, and could not strike from his feet ; and almost as regularly as he flew at him with his right hand, Neate warded the blow, or drew back out of its reach, and felled him with the return of his left. There was little cautious sparring—no half-hits—no tapping and trifling, none of

the *petit-maitreship* of the art—they were almost all knock-down blows:—the fight was a good stand-up fight. The wonder was the half-minute time. If there had been a minute or more allowed between each round, it would have been intelligible how they should by degrees recover strength and resolution; but to see two men smashed to the ground, smeared with gore, stunned, senseless, the breath beaten out of their bodies; and then, before you recover from the shock, to see them rise up with new strength and courage, stand steady to inflict or receive mortal offence, and rush upon each other “like two clouds over the Caspian”—this is the most astonishing thing of all—this is the high and heroic state of man! From this time forward the event became more certain every round; and about the twelfth it seemed as if it must have been over. Hickman generally stood with his back to me; but in the scuffle, he had changed positions, and Neate just then made a tremendous lunge at him, and hit him full in the face. It was doubtful whether he would fall backwards or forwards; he hung suspended for a second or two, and then fell back, throwing his hands in the air, and with his face lifted up to the sky. I never saw any thing more terrific than his aspect just before he fell. All traces of life, of natural expression, were gone from him. His face was like a human skull, a death’s head, spouting blood. The eyes were filled with blood, the nose streamed with blood, the mouth gaped blood. He was not like an actual man, but like a preternatural, spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante’s *Inferno*. Yet he fought on after this for several rounds, still striking the

first desperate blow, and Neate standing on the defensive, and using the same cautious guard to the last, as if he had still all his work to do ; and it was not till the Gas-man was so stunned in the seventeenth or eighteenth round, that his senses forsook him, and he could not come to time, that the battle was declared over.* Ye who despise the FANCY, do something to shew as much *pluck*, or as much self-possession as this, before you assume a superiority which you have never given a single proof of by any one action in the whole course of your lives ! When the Gas-man came to himself, the first words he uttered were, “ Where am I ? What is the matter ? ” “ Nothing is the matter, Tom, you have lost the battle, but you are the bravest man alive.” And Jackson whispered to him, “ I am collecting a purse for you, Tom.” Vain sounds, and unheard at that moment ! Neate instantly went up and shook him cordially by the hand, and seeing some old acquaintance, began to flourish with his fists, calling out, “ Ah, you always said I couldn’t fight—What do you think now ? ” But all in good humour, and without any appearance of arrogance ; only it was evident Bill Neate was pleased that he had won the fight. When it was over, I asked Cribb if he did not think it was a good one ? He said, “ *Pretty well !* ” The carrier-pigeons now mounted into the air, and one of them flew with the news of her husband’s

* Scroggins said of the Gas-man, that he thought he was a man of that courage, that if his hands were cut off, he would still fight on with the stumps—like that of Widrington,—

—“ In doleful dumps,
Who, when his legs were smitten off
Still fought upon his stumps.”

victory to the bosom of Mrs. Neate. Alas, for Mrs. Hickman !

Mais au revoir, as Sir Fopling Flutter says. I went down with Toms ; I returned with Jack Pigott, whom I met on the ground. Toms is a rattle-brain ; Pigott is a sentimentalist. Now, under favour, I am a sentimentalist too—therefore I say nothing, but that the interest of the excursion did not flag as I came back. Pigott and I marched along the causeway leading from Hungerford to Newbury, now observing the effect of a brilliant sun on the tawny meads or moss-coloured cottages, now exulting in the fight, now digressing to some topic of general and elegant literature. My friend was dressed in character for the occasion, or like one of the FANCY ; that is, with a double portion of great coats, clogs, and overhauls : and just as we had agreed with a couple of country-lads to carry his superfluous wearing apparel to the next town, we were overtaken by a return post-chaise, into which I got, Pigott preferring a seat on the bar. There were two strangers already in the chaise, and on their observing they supposed I had been to the fight, I said I had, and concluded they had done the same. They appeared, however, a little shy and sore on the subject ; and it was not till after several hints dropped, and questions put, that it turned out that they had missed it. One of these friends had undertaken to drive the other there in his gig : they had set out, to make sure work, the day before at three in the afternoon. The owner of the one-horse vehicle scorned to ask his way, and drove right on to Bagshot, instead of turning off at Hounslow : there they stopped all night, and set

off the next day across the country to Reading, from whence they took coach, and got down within a mile or two of Hungerford, just half an hour after the fight was over. This might be safely set down as one of the miseries of human life. We parted with these two gentlemen who had been to see the fight, but had returned as they went, at Wolverhampton, where we were promised beds (an irresistible temptation, for Pigott had passed the preceding night at Hungerford as we had done at Newbury), and we turned into an old bow-windowed parlour with a carpet and a snug fire ; and after devouring a quantity of tea, toast, and eggs, sat down to consider, during an hour of philosophic leisure, what we should have for supper. In the midst of an Epicurean deliberation between a roasted fowl and mutton chops with mashed potatoes, we were interrupted by an inroad of Goths and Vandals—*O procul este profani*—not real flash-men, but interlopers, noisy pretenders, butchers from Tothill-fields, brokers from Whitechapel, who called immediately for pipes and tobacco, hoping it would not be disagreeable to the gentlemen, and began to insist that it was *a cross*. Pigott withdrew from the smoke and noise into another room, and left me to dispute the point with them for a couple of hours *sans intermission* by the dial. The next morning we rose refreshed ; and on observing that Jack had a pocket volume in his hand, in which he read in the intervals of our discourse, I inquired what it was, and learned to my particular satisfaction that it was a volume of the New Eloise. Ladies, after this, will you contend that a love for the FANCY is incompatible with the cultivation of sentiment ? We

jogged on as before, my friend setting me up in a genteel drab great coat and green silk handkerchief (which I must say became me exceedingly), and after stretching our legs for a few miles, and seeing Jack Randall, Ned Turner, and Scroggins, pass on the top of one of the Bath coaches, we engaged with the driver of the second to take us to London for the usual fee. I got inside, and found three other passengers. One of them was an old gentleman with an aquiline nose, powdered hair, and a pigtail, and who looked as if he had played many a rubber at the Bath rooms. I said to myself, he is very like Mr. Windham ; I wish he would enter into conversation, that I might hear what fine observations would come from those finely-turned features. However, nothing passed, till, stopping to dine at Reading, some inquiry was made by the company about the fight, and I gave (as the reader may believe) an eloquent and animated description of it. When we got into the coach again, the old gentleman, after a graceful exordium, said, he had, when a boy, been to a fight between the famous Broughton and George Stevenson, who was called the *Fighting Coachman*, in the year 1770, with the late Mr. Windham. This beginning flattered the spirit of prophecy within me and rivetted my attention. He went on—“ George Stevenson was coachman to a friend of my father’s. He was an old man when I saw him some years afterwards. He took hold of his own arm and said, ‘ there was muscle here once, but now it is not more than this young gentleman’s.’ He added, ‘ Well, no matter ; I have been here long, I am willing to go hence, and I hope I have done no more harm than another man.’ ”

Once," said my unknown companion, " I asked him if he had ever beat Broughton ? He said Yes ; that he had fought with him three times, and the last time he fairly beat him, though the world did not allow it. ' I'll tell you how it was, master. When the seconds lifted us up in the last round, we were so exhausted that neither of us could stand, and we fell upon one another, and as Master Broughton fell uppermost, the mob gave it in his favour, and he was said to have won the battle. But,' says he, ' the fact was, that as his second (John Cuthbert) lifted him up, he said to him, " I'll fight no more, I've had enough ; " ' which,' says Stevenson, ' you know gave me the victory. And to prove to you that this was the case, when John Cuthbert was on his death-bed, and they asked him if there was any thing on his mind which he wished to confess, he answered, " Yes, that there was one thing he wished to set right, for that certainly Master Stevenson won that last fight with Master Broughton ; for he whispered him as he lifted him up in the last round of all, that he had had enough." ' This," said the Bath gentleman, " was a bit of human nature ; " and I have written this account of the fight on purpose that it might not be lost to the world. He also stated as a proof of the candour of mind in this class of men, that Stevenson acknowledged that Broughton could have beat him in his best day ; but that he (Broughton) was getting old in their last encounter. When we stopped in Piccadilly, I wanted to ask the gentleman some questions about the late Mr. Windham, but had not courage. I got out, resigned my coat and green silk handkerchief to Pigott (loth to part

with these ornaments of life), and walked home in high spirits.

P.S. Toms called upon me the next day, to ask me if I did not think the fight was a complete thing ? I said I thought it was. I hope he will relish my account of it.

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THE INDIAN JUGGLERS

COMING forward and seating himself on the ground in his white dress and tightened turban, the chief of the Indian Jugglers begins with tossing up two brass balls, which is what any of us could do, and concludes with keeping up four at the same time, which is what none of us could do to save our lives, nor if we were to take our whole lives to do it in. Is it then a trifling power we see at work, or is it not something next to miraculous ? It is the utmost stretch of human ingenuity, which nothing but the bending the faculties of body and mind to it from the tenderest infancy with incessant, ever anxious application up to manhood, can accomplish or make even a slight approach to. Man, thou art a wonderful animal, and thy ways past finding out ! Thou canst do strange things, but thou turnest them to little account —To conceive of this effort of extraordinary dexterity distracts the imagination and makes admiration breathless. Yet it costs nothing to the performer, any more than if it were a mere mechanical deception with which he had nothing to do but to watch and laugh at the astonishment of the spectators. A single error of a hair's breadth, of the smallest conceivable portion of time, would be fatal : the precision of the movements must be like a mathematical truth, their rapidity is like lightning.

To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again, to make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in their spheres, to make them chase one another like sparkles of fire, or shoot up like flowers or meteors, to throw them behind his back and twine them round his neck like ribbons or like serpents, to do what appears an impossibility, and to do it with all the ease, the grace, the carelessness imaginable, to laugh at, to play with the glittering mockeries, to follow them with his eye as if he could fascinate them with its lambent fire, or as if he had only to see that they kept time with the music on the stage —there is something in all this which he who does not admire may be quite sure he never really admired any thing in the whole course of his life. It is skill surmounting difficulty once mastered naturally resolved itself into ease and grace, and as if to be overcome at all, it must be overcome without an effort. The smallest awkwardness or want of pliancy or self-possession would stop the whole process. It is the work of witchcraft, and yet sport for children. Some of the other feats are quite as curious and wonderful, such as the balancing the artificial tree and shooting a bird from each branch through a quill ; though none of them have the elegance or facility of the keeping up of the brass balls. You are in pain for the result, and glad when the experiment is over ; they are not accompanied with the same unmixed, unchecked delight as the former ; and I would not give much to be merely astonished without being pleased at the same time. As to the swallowing of the sword,

the police ought to interfere to prevent it. When I saw the Indian Juggler do the same things before, his feet were bare, and he had large rings on the toes, which kept turning round all the time of the performance, as if they moved of themselves.—The hearing a speech in Parliament, drawled or stammered out by the Honourable Member or the Noble Lord, the ringing the changes on their common-places, which any one could repeat after them as well as they, stirs me not a jot, shakes not my good opinion of myself: but the seeing the Indian Jugglers does. It makes me ashamed of myself. I ask what there is that I can do as well as this? Nothing. What have I been doing all my life? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to shew for all my labour and pains? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark, and not finding them? Is there no one thing in which I can challenge competition, that I can bring as an instance of exact perfection, in which others cannot find a flaw? The utmost I can pretend to is to write a description of what this fellow can do. I can write a book: so can many others who have not even learned to spell. What abortions are these Essays! What errors, what ill-pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions! How little is made out, and that little how ill! Yet they are the best I can do. I endeavour to recollect all I have ever observed or thought upon a subject, and to express it as nearly as I can. Instead of writing on four subjects at a time, it is as much as

I can manage to keep the thread of one discourse clear and unentangled. I have also time on my hands to correct my opinions, and polish my periods: but the one I cannot, and the other I will not do. I am fond of arguing: yet with a good deal of pains and practice it is often as much as I can do to beat my man; though he may be a very indifferent hand. A common fencer would disarm his adversary in the twinkling of an eye, unless he were a professor like himself. A stroke of wit will sometimes produce this effect, but there is no such power or superiority in sense or reasoning. There is no complete mastery of execution to be shewn there: and you hardly know the professor from the impudent pretender or the mere clown.*

I have always had this feeling of the inefficacy and slow progress of intellectual compared to mechanical excellence, and it has always made me somewhat dissatisfied. It is a great many years since I saw Richer, the famous rope-dancer, perform at Sadler's Wells. He was matchless in his art, and added to his extraordinary skill exquisite ease, and unaffected natural

* The celebrated Peter Pindar (Dr. Wolcot) first discovered and brought out the talents of the late Mr. Opie, the painter. He was a poor Cornish boy, and was out at work in the fields, when the poet went in search of him. "Well, my lad, can you go and bring me your very best picture?" The other flew like lightning, and soon came back with what he considered as his master-piece. The stranger looked at it, and the young artist, after waiting for some time without his giving any opinion, at length exclaimed eagerly, "Well, what do you think of it?"—"Think of it?" said Wolcot, "why I think you ought to be ashamed of it—that you who might do so well, do no better!" The same answer would have applied to this artist's latest performances, that had been suggested by one of his earliest efforts.

grace. I was at that time employed in copying a half-length picture of Sir Joshua Reynolds's ; and it put me out of conceit with it. How ill this part was made out in the drawing ! How heavy, how slovenly this other was painted ! I could not help saying to myself, " If the rope-dancer had performed his task in this manner, leaving so many gaps and botches in his work, he would have broke his neck long ago ; I should never have seen that vigorous elasticity of nerve and precision of movement ! " — Is it then so easy an undertaking (comparatively) to dance on a tight-rope ? Let any one, who thinks so, get up and try. There is the thing. It is that which at first we cannot do at all, which in the end is done to such perfection. To account for this in some degree, I might observe that mechanical dexterity is confined to doing some one particular thing, which you can repeat as often as you please, in which you know whether you succeed or fail, and where the point of perfection consists in succeeding in a given undertaking. — In mechanical efforts, you improve by perpetual practice, and you do so infallibly, because the object to be attained is not a matter of taste or fancy or opinion, but of actual experiment, in which you must either do the thing or not do it. If a man is put to aim at a mark with a bow and arrow, he must hit it or miss it, that's certain. He cannot deceive himself, and go on shooting wide or falling short, and still fancy that he is making progress. The distinction between right and wrong, between true and false, is here palpable ; and he must either correct his aim or persevere in his error with his eyes open, for which there is neither excuse nor tempta-

tion. If a man is learning to dance on a rope, if he does not mind what he is about, he will break his neck. After that, it will be in vain for him to argue that he did not make a false step. His situation is not like that of Goldsmith's pedagogue.—

“ In argument they own'd his wondrous skill,
And e'en though vanquish'd, he could argue still.”

Danger is a good teacher, and makes apt scholars. So are disgrace, defeat, exposure to immediate scorn and laughter. There is no opportunity in such cases for self-delusion, no idling time away, no being off your guard (or you must take the consequences)—neither is there any room for humour or caprice or prejudice. If the Indian Juggler were to play tricks in throwing up the three case-knives, which keep their positions like the leaves of a crocus in the air, he would cut his fingers. I can make a very bad antithesis without cutting my fingers. The tact of style is more ambiguous than that of double-edged instruments. If the Juggler were told that by flinging himself under the wheels of the Jagger-naut, when the idol issues forth on a gaudy day, he would immediately be transported into Paradise, he might believe it, and nobody could disprove it. So the Brahmins may say what they please on that subject, may build up dogmas and mysteries without end, and not be detected: but their ingenious countryman cannot persuade the frequenters of the Olympic Theatre that he performs a number of astonishing feats without actually giving proofs of what he says.—There is then

in this sort of manual dexterity, first a gradual aptitude acquired to a given exertion of muscular power, from constant repetition, and in the next place, an exact knowledge how much is still wanting and necessary to be supplied. The obvious test is to increase the effort or nicety of the operation, and still to find it come true. The muscles ply instinctively to the dictates of habit. Certain movements and impressions of the hand and eye, having been repeated together an infinite number of times, are unconsciously but unavoidably cemented into closer and closer union ; the limbs require little more than to be put in motion for them to follow a regular track with ease and certainty ; so that the mere intention of the will acts mathematically, like touching the spring of a machine, and you come with Locksley in Ivanhoe, in shooting at a mark, " to allow for the wind."

Farther, what is meant by perfection in mechanical exercises is the performing certain feats to a uniform nicety, that is, in fact, undertaking no more than you can perform. You task yourself, the limit you fix is optional, and no more than human industry and skill can attain to : but you have no abstract, independent standard of difficulty or excellence (other than the extent of your own powers). Thus he who can keep up four brass balls does this *to perfection* ; but he cannot keep up five at the same instant, and would fail every time he attempted it. That is, the mechanical performer undertakes to emulate himself, not to equal another.* But the artist undertakes to imitate another, or to do

* If two persons play against each other at any game, one of them necessarily fails.

what nature has done, and this it appears is more difficult, *viz.* to copy what she has set before us in the face of nature or “human face divine,” entire and without a blemish, than to keep up four brass balls at the same instant ; for the one is done by the power of human skill and industry, and the other never was nor will be. Upon the whole, therefore, I have more respect for Reynolds, than I have for Richer ; for, happen how it will, there have been more people in the world who could dance on a rope like the one than who could paint like Sir Joshua. The latter was but a bungler in his profession to the other, it is true ; but then he had a harder task-master to obey, whose will was more wayward and obscure, and whose instructions it was more difficult to practise. You can put a child apprentice to a tumbler or rope-dancer with a comfortable prospect of success, if they are but sound of wind and limb ; but you cannot do the same thing in painting. The odds are a million to one. You may make indeed as many H——s and H——s, as you put into that sort of machine, but not one Reynolds amongst them all, with his grace, his grandeur, his blandness of *gusto*, “in tones and gestures hit,” unless you could make the man over again. To snatch this grace beyond the reach of art is then the height of art—where fine art begins, and where mechanical skill ends. The soft suffusion of the soul, the speechless breathing eloquence, the looks “commercing with the skies,” the ever-shifting forms of an eternal principle, that which is seen but for a moment, but dwells in the heart always, and is only seized as it passes by strong and secret sympathy, must be taught by nature and

genius, not by rules or study. It is suggested by feeling, not by laborious microscopic inspection ; in seeking for it without, we lose the harmonious clue to it within : and in aiming to grasp the substance, we let the very spirit of art evaporate. In a word, the objects of fine art are not the objects of sight but as these last are the objects of taste and imagination, that is, as they appeal to the sense of beauty, of pleasure, and of power in the human breast, and are explained by that finer sense, and revealed in their inner structure to the eye in return. Nature is also a language. Objects, like words, have a meaning ; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language, which he can only do by knowing its application to a thousand other objects in a thousand other situations. Thus the eye is too blind a guide of itself to distinguish between the warm or cold tone of a deep blue sky, but another sense acts as a monitor to it, and does not err. The colour of the leaves in autumn would be nothing without the feeling that accompanies it ; but it is that feeling that stamps them on the canvas, faded, seared, blighted, shrinking from the winter's flaw, and makes the sight as true as touch—

“ And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Cling to each leaf and hang on every bough.”

The more ethereal, evanescent, more refined and sublime part of art is the seeing nature through the medium of sentiment and passion, as each object is a symbol of the affections and a link in the chain of our endless being. But the unravelling this mysterious web of thought and feeling is alone the Muse's gift, namely, in the power of

that trembling sensibility which is awake to every change and every modification of its ever-varying impressions, that,

“ Thrills in each nerve, and lives along the line.”

This power is indifferently called genius, imagination, feeling, taste ; but the manner in which it acts upon the mind can neither be defined by abstract rules, as is the case in science, nor verified by continual unvarying experiments, as is the case in mechanical performances. The mechanical excellence of the Dutch painters in colouring and handling is that which comes the nearest in fine art to the perfection of certain manual exhibitions of skill. The truth of the effect and the facility with which it is produced are equally admirable. Up to a certain point, every thing is faultless. The hand and eye have done their part. There is only a want of taste and genius. It is after we enter upon that enchanted ground that the human mind begins to droop and flag as in a strange road, or in a thick mist, benighted and making little way with many attempts and many failures, and that the best of us only escape with half a triumph. The undefined and the imaginary are the regions that we must pass like Satan, difficult and doubtful, “ half flying, half on foot.” The object in sense is a positive thing, and execution comes with practice.

Cleverness is a certain *knack* or aptitude at doing certain things, which depend more on a particular adroitness and off-hand readiness than on force or perseverance, such as making puns, making epigrams, making ex-

tempore verses, mimicking the company, mimicking a style, &c. Cleverness is either liveliness and smartness, or something answering to *sleight of hand*, like letting a glass fall sideways off a table, or else a trick, like knowing the secret spring of a watch. Accomplishments are certain external graces, which are to be learnt from others and which are easily displayed to the admiration of the beholder, *viz.* dancing, riding, fencing, music, and so on. These ornamental acquirements are only proper to those who are at ease in mind and fortune. I know an individual who if he had been born to an estate of five thousand a year, would have been the most accomplished gentleman of the age. He would have been the delight and envy of the circle in which he moved—would have graced by his manners the liberality flowing from the openness of his heart, would have laughed with the women, have argued with the men, have said good things and written agreeable ones, have taken a hand at piquet or the lead at the harpsichord, and have set and sung his own verses—*nugæ canoræ*—with tenderness and spirit ; a Rochester without the vice, a modern Surrey ! As it is, all these capabilities of excellence stand in his way. He is too versatile for a professional man, not dull enough for a political drudge, too gay to be happy, too thoughtless to be rich. He wants the enthusiasm of the poet, the severity of the prose-writer, and the application of the man of business.—Talent is the capacity of doing any thing that depends on application and industry, such as writing a criticism, making a speech, studying the law. Talent differs from genius, as voluntary differs from involuntary power. Ingenuity is genius in trifles,

greatness is genius in undertakings of much pith and moment. A clever or ingenious man is one who can do any thing well, whether it is worth doing or not : a great man is one who can do that which when done is of the highest importance. Themistocles said he could not play on the flute, but that he could make of a small city a great one. This gives one a pretty good idea of the distinction in question.

Greatness is great power, producing great effects. It is not enough that a man has great power in himself, he must shew it to all the world in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid. He must fill up a certain idea in the public mind. I have no other notion of greatness than this two-fold definition, great results springing from great inherent energy. The great in visible objects has relation to that which extends over space : the great in mental ones has to do with space and time. No man is truly great, who is great only in his life-time. The test of greatness is the page of history. Nothing can be said to be great that has a distinct limit, or that borders on something evidently greater than itself. Besides, what is short-lived and pampered into mere notoriety, is of a gross and vulgar quality in itself. A Lord Mayor is hardly a great man. A city orator or patriot of the day only shew, by reaching the height of their wishes, the distance they are at from any true ambition. Popularity is neither fame nor greatness. A king (as such) is not a great man. He has great power, but it is not his own. He merely wields the lever of the state, which a child, an idiot, or a madman can do. It is the office, not the man we gaze at. Any one else in the same situation

would be just as much an object of abject curiosity. We laugh at the country girl who having seen a king expressed her disappointment by saying, "Why, he is only a man!" Yet, knowing this, we run to see a king as if he was something more than a man.—To display the greatest powers, unless they are applied to great purposes, makes nothing for the character of greatness. To throw a barley-corn through the eye of a needle, to multiply nine figures by nine in the memory, argues infinite dexterity of body and capacity of mind, but nothing comes of either. There is a surprising power at work, but the effects are not proportionate, or such as take hold of the imagination. To impress the idea of power on others, they must be made in some way to feel it. It must be communicated to their understandings in the shape of an increase of knowledge, or it must subdue and overawe them by subjecting their wills. Admiration, to be solid and lasting, must be founded on proofs from which we have no means of escaping ; it is neither a slight nor a voluntary gift. A mathematician who solves a profound problem, a poet who creates an image of beauty in the mind that was not there before, imparts knowledge and power to others, in which his greatness and his fame consists, and on which it reposes. Jedediah Buxton will be forgotten ; but Napier's bones will live. Lawgivers, philosophers, founders of religion, conquerors and heroes, inventors and great geniuses in arts and sciences, are great men ; for they are great public benefactors, or formidable scourges to mankind. Among ourselves, Shakespear, Newton, Bacon, Milton, Cromwell, were great men ; for they shewed great power

by acts and thoughts, which have not yet been consigned to oblivion. They must needs be men of lofty stature, whose shadows lengthen out to remote posterity. A great farce-writer may be a great man ; for Molière was but a great farce-writer. In my mind, the author of *Don Quixote* was a great man. So have there been many others. A great chess-player is not a great man, for he leaves the world as he found it. No act terminating in itself constitutes greatness. This will apply to all displays of power or trials of skill, which are confined to the momentary, individual effort, and construct no permanent image or trophy of themselves without them. Is not an actor then a great man, because “ he dies and leaves the world no copy ? ” I must make an exception for Mrs. Siddons, or else give up my definition of greatness for her sake. A man at the top of his profession is not therefore a great man. He is great in his way, but that is all, unless he shews the marks of a great moving intellect, so that we trace the master-mind, and can sympathise with the springs that urge him on. The rest is but a craft or *mystery*. John Hunter was a great man—that any one might see without the smallest skill in surgery. His style and manner shewed the man. He would set about cutting up the carcase of a whale with the same greatness of *gusto* that Michael Angelo would have hewn a block of marble. Lord Nelson was a great naval commander ; but for myself, I have not much opinion of a sea-faring life. Sir Humphry Davy is a great chemist, but I am not sure than he is a great man. I am not a bit the wiser for any of his discoveries, nor I never met with any one that was. But it is in the

nature of greatness to propagate an idea of itself, as wave impels wave, circle without circle. It is a contradiction in terms for a coxcomb to be a great man. A really great man has always an idea of something greater than himself. I have observed that certain sectaries and polemical writers have no higher compliment to pay their most shining lights than to say that "Such a one was a considerable man in his day." Some new elucidation of a text sets aside the authority of the old interpretation, and a "great scholar's memory outlives him half a century," at the utmost. A rich man is not a great man, except to his dependants and his steward. A lord is a great man in the idea we have of his ancestry, and probably of himself, if we know nothing of him but his title. I have heard a story of two bishops, one of whom said (speaking of St. Peter's at Rome) that when he first entered it, he was rather awe-struck, but that as he walked up it, his mind seemed to swell and dilate with it, and at last to fill the whole building—the other said that as he saw more of it, he appeared to himself to grow less and less every step he took, and in the end to dwindle into nothing. This was in some respects a striking picture of a great and little mind—for greatness sympathises with greatness, and littleness shrinks into itself. The one might have become a Wolsey; the other was only fit to become a Mendicant Friar—or there might have been court-reasons for making him a bishop. The French have to me a character of littleness in all about them; but they have produced three great men that belong to every country, Molière, Rabelais, and Montaigne.

To return from this digression, and conclude the Essay. A singular instance of manual dexterity was shewn in the person of the late John Cavanagh, whom I have several times seen. His death was celebrated at the time in an article in the *Examiner* newspaper (Feb. 7, 1819), written apparently between jest and earnest: but as it is *not* to our purpose, and falls in with my own way of considering such subjects, I shall here take leave to quote it.

“ Died at his house in Burbage-street, St. Giles’s, John Cavanagh, the famous hand fives-player. When a person dies, who does any one thing better than any one else in the world, which so many others are trying to do well, it leaves a gap in society. It is not likely that any one will now see the game of fives played in its perfection for many years to come—for Cavanagh is dead, and has not left his peer behind him. It may be said that there are things of more importance than striking a ball against a wall—there are things indeed which make more noise and do as little good, such as making war and peace, making speeches and answering them, making verses and blotting them; making money and throwing it away. But the game of fives is what no one despises who has ever played at it. It is the finest exercise for the body, and the best relaxation for the mind. The Roman poet said that ‘ Care mounted behind the horseman and stuck to his skirts.’ But this remark would not have applied to the fives-player. He who takes to playing at fives is twice young. He feels neither the past nor future ‘ in the instant.’ Debts, taxes, ‘ domestic treason, foreign levy, nothing can touch him further.’ He has no other wish,

no other thought, from the moment the game begins, but that of striking the ball, of placing it, of *making* it ! This Cavanagh was sure to do. Whenever he touched the ball, there was an end of the chase. His eye was certain, his hand fatal, his presence of mind complete. He could do what he pleased, and he always knew exactly what to do. He saw the whole game, and played it ; took instant advantage of his adversary's weakness, and recovered balls, as if by a miracle and from sudden thought, that every one gave for lost. He had equal power and skill, quickness, and judgment. He could either out-wit his antagonist by finesse, or beat him by main strength. Sometimes, when he seemed preparing to send the ball with the full swing of his arm, he would by a slight turn of his wrist drop it within an inch of the line. In general, the ball came from his hand, as if from a racket, in a straight horizontal line ; so that it was in vain to attempt to overtake or stop it. As it was said of a great orator that he never was at a loss for a word, and for the properest word, so Cavanagh always could tell the degree of force necessary to be given to a ball, and the precise direction in which it should be sent. He did his work with the greatest ease ; never took more pains than was necessary ; and while others were fagging themselves to death, was as cool and collected as if he had just entered the court. His style of play was as remarkable as his power of execution. He had no affectation, no trifling. He did not throw away the game to show off an attitude, or try an experiment. He was a fine, sensible, manly player, who did what he could, but that was more than any one else could even affect.

to do. His blows were not undecided and ineffectual—lumbering like Mr. Wordsworth's epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge's lyric prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham's speeches, nor wide of it like Mr. Canning's wit, nor foul like the *Quarterly*, not *let* balls like the *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett and Junius together would have made a Cavanagh. He was the best *up-hill* player in the world; even when his adversary was fourteen, he would play on the same or better, and as he never flung away the game through carelessness and conceit, he never gave it up through laziness or want of heart. The only peculiarity of his play was that he never *volleyed*, but let the balls hop; but if they rose an inch from the ground, he never missed having them. There was not only nobody equal, but nobody second to him. It is supposed that he could give any other player half the game, or beat him with his left hand. His service was tremendous. He once played Woodward and Meredith together (two of the best players in England) in the Fives-court, St. Martin's-street, and made seven and twenty aces following by services alone—a thing unheard of. He another time played Peru, who was considered a first-rate fives-player, a match of the best out of five games, and in the three first games, which of course decided the match, Peru got only one ace. Cavanagh was an Irishman by birth, and a house-painter by profession. He had once laid aside his working dress, and walked up, in his smartest clothes, to the Rosemary Branch, to have an afternoon's pleasure. A person accosted him, and asked him if he would have a game. So they agreed to play for half-a-crown a game,

and a bottle of cider. The first game began—it was seven, eight, ten, thirteen, fourteen, all. Cavanagh won it. The next was the same. They played on, and each game was hardly contested. ‘There,’ said the unconscious fives-player, ‘there was a stroke that Cavanagh could not take; I never played better in my life, and yet I can’t win a game. I don’t know how it is.’ However, they played on, Cavanagh winning every game, and the by-standers drinking the cider, and laughing all the time. In the twelfth game, when Cavanagh was only four, and the stranger thirteen, a person came in, and said, ‘What! are you here, Cavanagh?’ The words were no sooner pronounced than the astonished player let the ball drop from his hand, and saying, ‘What! have I been breaking my heart all this time to beat Cavanagh?’ refused to make another effort. ‘And yet, I give you my word,’ said Cavanagh, telling the story with some triumph, ‘I played all the while with my clenched fist.’—He used frequently to play matches at Copenhagen-house for wagers and dinners. The wall against which they play is the same that supports the kitchen-chimney, and when the wall resounded louder than usual, the cooks exclaimed, ‘Those are the Irishman’s balls,’ and the joints trembled on the spit!—Goldsmith consoled himself that there were places where he too was admired: and Cavanagh was the admiration of all the fives-courts, where he ever played. Mr. Powell, when he played matches in the Court in St. Martin’s-street, used to fill his gallery at half a crown a head, with amateurs and admirers of talent in whatever department it is shewn. He could not

have shewn himself in any ground in England, but he would have been immediately surrounded with inquisitive gazers, trying to find out in what part of his frame his unrivalled skill lay, as politicians wonder to see the balance of Europe suspended in Lord Castlereagh's face, and admire the trophies of the British Navy lurking under Mr. Croker's hanging brow. Now Cavanagh was as good-looking a man as the Noble Lord, and much better looking than the Right Hon. Secretary. He had a clear, open countenance, and did not look sideways or down, like Mr. Murray the bookseller. He was a young fellow of sense, humour, and courage. He once had a quarrel with a waterman at Hungerford stairs, and, they say, served him out in great style. In a word, there are hundreds at this day, who cannot mention his name without admiration, as the best fives-player that perhaps ever lived (the greatest excellence of which they have any notion)—and the noisy shout of the ring happily stood him in stead of the unheard voice of posterity!—The only person who seems to have excelled as much in another way as Cavanagh did in his, was the late John Davies, the racket-player. It was remarked of him that he did not seem to follow the ball, but the ball seemed to follow him. Give him a foot of wall, and he was sure to make the ball. The four best racket-players of that day were Jack Spines, Jem. Harding, Armitage, and Church. Davies could give any one of these two hands a time, that is, half the game, and each of these, at their best, could give the best player now in London the same odds. Such are the gradations in all exertions of human skill and art. He once played four capital players together,

and beat them. He was also a first-rate tennis-player, and an excellent fives-player. In the Fleet or King's Bench, he would have stood against Powell, who was reckoned the best open-ground player of his time. This last-mentioned player is at present the keeper of the Fives-court, and we might recommend to him for a motto over his door—‘Who enters here, forgets himself, his country, and his friends.’ And the best of it is, that by the calculation of the odds, none of the three are worth remembering!—Cavanagh died from the bursting of a blood-vessel, which prevented him from playing for the last two or three years. This, he was often heard to say, he thought hard upon him. He was fast recovering, however, when he was suddenly carried off, to the regret of all who knew him. As Mr. Peel made it a qualification of the present Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton, that he was an excellent moral character, so Jack Cavanagh was a zealous Catholic, and could not be persuaded to eat meat on a Friday, the day on which he died. We have paid this willing tribute to his memory.

‘ Let no rude hand deface it,
And his forlorn “ *Hic Jacet.*” ’ ’

The Examiner, February 1819.
Table Talk, 1821.

THE LETTER-BELL

COMPLAINTS are frequently made of the vanity and shortness of human life, when, if we examine its smallest details, they present a world by themselves. The most trifling objects, retraced with the eye of memory, assume the vividness, the delicacy, and importance of insects seen through a magnifying glass. There is no end of the brilliancy or the variety. The habitual feeling of the love of life may be compared to "one entire and perfect chrysolite," which, if analysed, breaks into a thousand shining fragments. Ask the sum-total of the value of human life, and we are puzzled with the length of the account and the multiplicity of items in it: take any one of them apart, and it is wonderful what matter for reflection will be found in it! As I write this, the *Letter-Bell* passes: it has a lively, pleasant sound with it, and not only fills the street with its importunate clamour, but rings clear through the length of many half-forgotten years. It strikes upon the ear, it vibrates to the brain, it wakes me from the dream of time, it flings me back upon my first entrance into life, the period of my first coming up to town, when all around was strange, uncertain, adverse—a hubbub of confused noises, a chaos of shifting objects—and when this sound alone, startling me with the recollection of a letter I had to send to the friends I had lately left, brought me as it were to myself,

made me feel that I had links still connecting me with the universe, and gave me hope and patience to persevere. At that loud-tinkling, interrupted sound (now and then), the long line of blue hills near the place where I was brought up waves in the horizon, a golden sunset hovers over them, the dwarf-oaks rustle their red leaves in the evening-breeze, and the road from —— to——, by which I first set out on my journey through life, stares me in the face as plain, but from time and change not less visionary and mysterious, than the pictures in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. I should notice, that at this time the light of the French Revolution circled my head like a glory, though dabbled with drops of crimson gore : I walked comfortable and cheerful by its side :

“ And by the vision splendid
Was on my way attended.”

It rose then in the east : it has again risen in the west. Two suns in one day, two triumphs of liberty in one age, is a miracle which I hope the Laureate will hail in appropriate verse. Or may not Mr. Wordsworth give a different turn to the fine passage, beginning :

“ What though the radiance which was once so bright,
Be now for ever vanished from my sight ;
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower ? ”

For is it not brought back, “ like morn risen on midnight ” ; and may he not yet greet the yellow light shining on the evening bank with eyes of youth, of genius,

and freedom, as of yore ? No, never ! But what would not these persons give for the unbroken integrity of their early opinions—for one unshackled, uncontaminated strain—one *Io pæan* to liberty—one burst of indignation against tyrants and sycophants, who subject other countries to slavery by force, and prepare their own for it by servile sophistry, as we see the huge serpent lick over its trembling, helpless victim with its slime and poison, before it devours it ! On every stanza so penned should be written the word RECREANT ! Every taunt, every reproach, every note of exultation at restored light and freedom, would recall to them how their hearts failed them in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. And what shall we say to *him*—the sleep-walker, the dreamer, the sophist, the word-hunter, the craver after sympathy, but still vulnerable to truth, accessible to opinion, because not sordid or mechanical ? The Bourbons being no longer tied about his neck, he may perhaps recover his original liberty of speculating ; so that we may apply to him the lines about his own *Ancient Mariner* :

“ And from his neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.”

This is the reason I can write an article on the *Letter-Bell*, and other such subjects ; I have never given the lie to my own soul. If I have felt any impression once, I feel it more strongly a second time ; and I have no wish to revile or discard my best thoughts. There is at least a thorough *keeping* in what I write—not a line

that betrays a principle or disguises a feeling. If my wealth is small, it all goes to enrich the same heap ; and trifles in this way accumulate to a tolerable sum. Or if the Letter-Bell does not lead me a dance into the country, it fixes me in the thick of my town recollections, I know not how long ago. It was a kind of alarm to break off from my work when there happened to be company to dinner or when I was going to the play. *That* was going to the play, indeed, when I went twice a year, and had not been more than half a dozen times in my life. Even the idea that any one else in the house was going, was a sort of reflected enjoyment, and conjured up a lively anticipation of the scene. I remember a Miss D——, a maiden lady from Wales (who in her youth was to have been married to an earl), tantalised me greatly in this way, by talking all day of going to see Mrs. Siddons' "airs and graces" at night in some favourite part ; and when the Letter-Bell announced that the time was approaching, and its last receding sound lingered on the ear, or was lost in silence, how anxious and uneasy I became, lest she and her companion should not be in time to get good places—lest the curtain should draw up before they arrived—and lest I should lose one line or look in the intelligent report which I should hear the next morning ! The punctuating of time at that early period—every thing that gives it an articulate voice—seems of the utmost consequence ; for we do not know what scenes in the *ideal* world may run out of them ; a world of interest may hang upon every instant, and we can hardly sustain the weight of future years which are contained in embryo in the most minute

and inconsiderable passing events. How often have I put off writing a letter till it was too late ! How often had to run after the postman with it—now missing, now recovering the sound of his bell—breathless, angry with myself—then hearing the welcome sound come full round a corner—and seeing the scarlet costume which set all my fears and self-reproaches at rest ! I do not recollect having ever repented giving a letter to the postman, or wishing to retrieve it after he had once deposited it in his bag. What I have once set my hand to, I take the consequences of, and have been always pretty much of the same humour in this respect. I am not like the person who, having sent off a letter to his mistress, who resided a hundred and twenty miles in the country, and disapproving, on second thoughts, of some expressions contained in it, took a post-chaise and four to follow and intercept it the next morning. At other times, I have sat and watched the decaying embers in a little *back* painting-room (just as the wintry day declined), and brooded over the half-finished copy of a Rembrandt, or a landscape by Vangoyen, placing it where it might catch a dim gleam of light from the fire ; while the Letter-Bell was the only sound that drew my thoughts to the world without, and reminded me that I had a task to perform in it. As to that landscape, methinks I see it now :

“ The slow canal, the yellow-blossomed vale,
The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail.”

There was a windmill, too, with a poor low clay-built cottage beside it : how delighted I was when I had made

the tremulous, undulating reflection in the water, and saw the dull canvas become a lucid mirror of the commonest features of nature ! Certainly, painting gives one a strong interest in nature and humanity (it is not the *dandy-school* of morals or sentiment)—

“ While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.”

Perhaps there is no part of a painter’s life (if we must tell “ the secrets of the prison-house ”) in which he has more enjoyment of himself and his art, than that in which after his work is over, and with furtive, sidelong glances at what he has done, he is employed in washing his brushes and cleaning his pallet for the day. Afterwards, when he gets a servant in livery to do this for him, he may have other and more ostensible sources of satisfaction—greater splendour, wealth, or fame ; but he will not be so wholly in his art, nor will his art have such a hold on him as when he was too poor to transfer its meanest drudgery to others—too humble to despise aught that had to do with the object of his glory and his pride, with that on which all his projects of ambition or pleasure were founded. “ Entire affection scorneth nicer hands.” When the professor is above this mechanical part of his business, it may have become a *stalking-horse* to other worldly schemes, but is no longer his *hobby-horse* and the delight of his inmost thoughts—

“ His shame in crowds, his solitary pride ! ”

I used sometimes to hurry through this part of my occupation, while the Letter-Bell (which was my dinner-bell) summoned me to the fraternal board, where youth and hope

“ Made good digestion wait on appetite
And health on both—”

or oftener I put it off till after dinner, that I might loiter longer and with more luxurious indolence over it, and connect it with the thoughts of my next day's labours.

The dustman's-bell, with its heavy, monotonous noise, and the brisk, lively tinkle of the muffin-bell, have something in them, but not much. They will bear dilating upon with the utmost licence of inventive prose. All things are not alike *conductors* to the imagination. A learned Scotch professor found fault with an ingenious friend and arch-critic for cultivating a rookery on his grounds: the professor declared “ he would as soon think of encouraging a *froggery*.” This was barbarous as it was senseless. Strange, that a country that has produced the Scotch novels and Gertrude of Wyoming should want sentiment !

The postman's double knock at the door the next morning is “ more germain to the matter.” How that knock often goes to the heart ! We distinguish to a nicety the arrival of the Two-penny or the General Post. The summons of the latter is louder and heavier, as bringing news from a greater distance, and as, the longer it has been delayed, fraught with a deeper interest. We catch the sound of what is to be paid—eightpence, ninepence,

a shilling—and our hopes generally rise with the postage. How we are provoked at the delay in getting change—at the servant who does not hear the door ! Then if the postman passes, and we do not hear the expected knock, what a pang is there ! It is like the silence of death—of hope ! We think he does it on purpose, and enjoys all the misery of our suspense. I have sometimes walked out to see the Mail-Coach pass, by which I had sent a letter, or to meet it when I expected one. I never see a Mail-Coach, for this reason, but I look at it as the bearer of glad tidings—the messenger of fate. I have reason to say so. The finest sight in the metropolis is that of the Mail-Coaches setting off from Piccadilly. The horses paw the ground, and are impatient to be gone, as if conscious of the precious burden they convey. There is a peculiar secrecy and despatch, significant and full of meaning, in all the proceedings concerning them. Even the outside passengers have an erect and supercilious air, as if proof against the accidents of the journey. In fact, it seems indifferent whether they are to encounter the summer's heat or winter's cold, since they are borne on through the air in a winged chariot. The Mail-Carts drive up ; the transfer of packages is made ; and, at a signal given, they start off, bearing the irrevocable scrolls that give wings to thought, and that bind or sever hearts for ever. How we hate the Putney and Brentford stages that draw up in a line after they are gone ! Some persons think the sublimest object in nature is a ship launched on the bottom of the ocean : but give me, for my private satisfaction, the Mail-Coaches that pour down Piccadilly of an evening, tear up the

pavement and devour the way before them to the Land's-End !

In Cowper's time, Mail-Coaches were hardly set up ; but he has beautifully described the coming in of the Post-Boy :

“ Hark ! 'tis the twanging horn o'er yonder bridge,
That with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the wintry flood, in which the moon
Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright :
He comes, the herald of a noisy world,
With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks ;
News from all nations lumbering at his back.
True to his charge, the close-packed load behind,
Yet careless what he brings, his one concern
Is to conduct it to the destined inn :
And having dropped the expected bag, pass on.
He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch !
Cold and yet cheerful ; messenger of grief
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some ;
To him indifferent whether grief or joy.
Houses in ashes and the fall of stocks,
Births, deaths, and marriages, epistles wet
With tears that trickled down the writer's cheeks
Fast as the periods from his fluent quill,
Or charged with amorous sighs of absent swains
Or nymphs responsive, equally affect
His horse and him, unconscious of them all.”

And yet, notwithstanding this, and so many other passages that seem like the very marrow of our being,

Lord Byron denies that Cowper was a poet ! The Mail-Coach is an improvement on the Post-Boy ; but I fear it will hardly bear so poetical a description. The picturesque and dramatic do not keep pace with the useful and mechanical. The telegraphs that lately communicated the intelligence of the new revolution to all France within a few hours, are a wonderful contrivance ; but they are less striking and appalling than the beacon-fires (mentioned by Æschylus), which, lighted from hill-top to hill-top, announced the taking of Troy, and the return of Agamemnon.

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MERRY ENGLAND

“St. George for merry England !”

THIS old-fashioned epithet might be supposed to have been bestowed ironically, or on the old principle—*Ut lucus a non lucendo*. Yet there is some thing in the sound that hits the fancy, and a sort of truth beyond appearances. To be sure, it is from a dull, homely ground that the gleams of mirth and jollity break out ; but the streaks of light that tinge the evening sky are not the less striking on that account. The beams of the morning-sun shining on the lonely glades, or through the idle branches of the tangled forest, the leisure, the freedom, “the pleasure of going and coming without knowing where,” the troops of wild deer, the sports of the chase, and other rustic gambols, were sufficient to justify the well-known appellation of “Merry Sherwood,” and in like manner we may apply the phrase to *Merry England*. The smile is not the less sincere because it does not always play upon the cheek ; and the jest is not the less welcome, nor the laugh less hearty, because they happen to be a relief from care or leaden-eyed melancholy. The instances are the more precious as they are rare ; and we look forward to them with the greater good will, or pack upon them with the greater gratitude, as we drain

the last drop in the cup with particular relish. If not always gay or in good spirits, we are glad when any occasion draws us out of our natural gloom, and disposed to make the most of it. We may say with Silence in the play, “I have been merry once ere now,” and this once was to serve him all his life ; for he was a person of wonderful silence and gravity, though “he chirped over his cups,” and announced with characteristic glee that “there were pippins and cheese to come.” Silence was in this sense a merry man, that is, he would be merry if he could, and a very great economy of wit, like very slender fare, was a banquet to him, from the simplicity of his taste and habits. “Continents,” says Hobbes, “have most of what they contain,” and in this view it may be contended that the English are the merriest people in the world, since they only show it on high-days and holidays. They are then like a school-boy let loose from school, or like a dog that has slipped his collar. They are not gay like the French, who are one eternal smile of self-complacency, tortured into affectation, or spun into languid indifference, nor are they voluptuous and immersed in sensual indolence, like the Italians ; but they have that sort of intermittent, fitful, irregular gaiety, which is neither worn out by habit, nor deadened by passion, but is sought with avidity as it takes the mind by surprise, is startled by a sense of oddity and incongruity, indulges its wayward humours or lively impulses, with perfect freedom and lightness of heart, and seizes occasion by the forelock, that it may return to serious business with more cheerfulness, and have something to beguile the hours of thought or sadness.

I do not see how there can be high spirits without low ones ; and every thing has its price according to circumstances. Perhaps we have to pay a heavier tax on pleasure, than some others : what skills it, so long as our good spirits and good hearts enable us to bear it ?

“ They ” (the English), says Froissart, “ amused themselves sadly after the fashion of their country ”—*ils se rejouissoient tristement selon la coutume de leur pays.* They have indeed a way of their own. Their mirth is a relaxation from gravity, a challenge to dull care to be gone ; and one is not always clear at first, whether the appeal is successful. The cloud may still hang on the brow ; the ice may not thaw at once. To help them out in their new character is an act of charity. Any thing short of hanging or drowning is something to begin with. They do not enter into their amusements the less doggedly because they may plague others. They like a thing the better for hitting them a rap on the knuckles, for making their blood tingle. They do not dance or sing, but they make good cheer—“ eat, drink, and are merry.” No people are fonder of field-sports, Christmas gambols, or practical jests. Blindman’s-buff, hunt-the-slipper, hot-cockles, and snap-dragon are all approved English games, full of laughable surprises and “ hair-breadth ’scapes,” and serve to amuse the winter fire-side after the roast beef and plum-pudding, the spiced ale and roasted crab, thrown (hissing-hot) into the foaming tankard. Punch (not the liquor, but the puppet) is not, I fear, of English origin ; but there is no place, I take it, where he finds himself more at home or meets a more joyous welcome, where he collects greater crowds at the

corners of streets, where he opens the eyes or distends the cheeks wider, or where the bangs and blows, the uncouth gestures, ridiculous anger and screaming voice of the chief performer excite more boundless merriment or louder bursts of laughter among all ranks and sorts of people. An English theatre is the very throne of pantomime ; nor do I believe that the gallery and boxes of Drury-lane or Covent-garden filled on the proper occasions with holiday folks (big or little) yield the palm for undisguised, tumultuous, inextinguishable laughter to any spot in Europe. I do not speak of the refinement of the mirth (this is no fastidious speculation) but of its cordiality, on the return of these long-looked-for and licensed periods ; and I may add here, by way of illustration, that the English common people are a sort of grown children, spoiled and sulky perhaps, but full of glee and merriment, when their attention is drawn off by some sudden and striking object. The May-pole is almost gone out of fashion among us : but May-day, besides its flowering hawthorns and its pearly dews, has still its boasted exhibition of painted chimney-sweepers and their Jack-o'-the-Green, whose tawdry finery, bedizened faces, unwonted gestures, and short-lived pleasures call forth good-humoured smiles and looks of sympathy in the spectators. There is no place where trap-ball, fives, prison-base, foot-ball, quoits, bowls are better understood or more successfully practised ; and the very names of a cricket bat and ball make English fingers tingle. What happy days must " Long Robinson " have passed in getting ready his wickets and mending his bats, who, when two of the fingers of his

right-hand were struck off by the violence of a ball, had a screw fastened to it to hold the bat, and with the other hand still sent the ball thundering against the boards that bounded *Old Lord's cricket-ground* ! What delightful hours must have been his in looking forward to the matches that were to come, in recounting the feats he had performed in those that were past ! I have myself whiled away whole mornings in seeing him strike the ball (like a countryman mowing with a scythe) to the farthest extremity of the smooth, level, sun-burnt ground, and with long, awkward strides count the notches that made victory sure ! Then again, cudgel-playing, quarter-staff, bull and badger-baiting, cock-fighting are almost the peculiar diversions of this island, and often objected to us as barbarous and cruel ; horse-racing is the delight and the ruin of numbers ; and the noble science of boxing is all our own. Foreigners can scarcely understand how we can squeeze pleasure out of this pastime ; the luxury of hard blows given or received ; the joy of the ring ; nor the perseverance of the combatants.* The English also excel, or are not

* "The gentle and free Passage of arms at Ashby" was, we are told, so called by the Chroniclers of the time, on account of the feats of horsemanship and the quantity of knightly blood that was shed. This last circumstance was perhaps necessary to qualify it with the epithet of "gentle," in the opinion of some of these historians. I think the reason why the English are the bravest nation on earth is, that the thought of blood or a delight in cruelty is not the chief excitement with them. Where it is, there is necessarily a *reaction* ; for though it may add to our eagerness and savage ferocity in inflicting wounds, it does not enable us to endure them with greater patience. The English are led to the attack or sustain it equally well, because they fight as they box, not out of malice, but to show *pluck* and manhood. *Fair play and old*

excelled in wiring a hare, in stalking a deer, in shooting, fishing, and hunting. England to this day boasts her Robin Hood and his merry men, that stout archer and outlaw, and patron-saint of the sporting-calendar. What a cheerful sound is that of the hunters, issuing from the autumnal wood and sweeping over hill and dale !

— “A cry more tuneable
Was never halloo'd to by hound or horn.”

What sparkling richness in the scarlet coats of the riders, what a glittering confusion in the pack, what spirit in the horses, what eagerness in the followers on foot, as they disperse over the plain, or force their way over hedge and ditch ! Surely, the coloured prints and pictures of these, hung up in gentlemen's halls and village alehouses, however humble as works of art, have more life and health and spirit in them, and mark the pith and nerve of the national character more creditably than the

England for ever ! This is the only bravery that will stand the test. There is the same determination and spirit shown in resistance as in attack ; but not the same pleasure in getting a cut with a sabre as in giving one. There is, therefore, always a certain degree of effeminacy mixed up with any approach to cruelty, since both have their source in the same principle, *viz.* an over-valuing of pain.¹ This was the reason the French (having the best cause and the best general in the world) ran away at Waterloo, because they were inflamed, furious, drunk with the blood of their enemies, but when it came to their turn, wanting the same stimulus, they were panic-struck, and their hearts and their senses failed them all at once.

¹ Vanity is the same half-witted principle, compared with pride. It leaves men in the lurch when it is most needed ; is mortified at being reduced to stand on the defensive, and relinquishes the field to its more surly antagonist.

mawkish, sentimental, affected designs of Theseus and Pirithous, and Æneas and Dido, pasted on foreign *salons à manger*, and the interior of country-houses. If our tastes are not epic, nor our pretensions lofty, they are simple and our own ; and we may possibly enjoy our native rural sports, and the rude remembrances of them, with the truer relish on this account, that they are suited to us and we to them. The English nation, too, are naturally “brother of the angle.” This pursuit implies just that mixture of patience and pastime, of vacancy and thoughtfulness, of idleness and business, of pleasure and of pain, which is suited to the genius of an Englishman, and as I suspect, of no one else in the same degree. He is eminently gifted to stand in the situation assigned by Dr. Johnson to the angler, “at one end of a rod with a worm at the other.” I should suppose no language can show such a book as an often-mentioned one, Walton’s Complete Angler—so full of *naïveté*, of unaffected sprightliness, of busy trifling, of dainty songs, of refreshing brooks, of shady arbours, of happy thoughts and of the herb called *Heart’s Ease* ! Some persons can see neither the wit nor wisdom of this genuine volume, as if a book as well as a man might not have a personal character belonging to it, amiable, venerable from the spirit of joy and thorough goodness it manifests, independently of acute remarks or scientific discoveries : others object to the cruelty of Walton’s theory and practice of trout-fishing—for my part, I should as soon charge an infant with cruelty for killing a fly, and I feel the same sort of pleasure in reading his book as I should have done in the company of this happy, child-like old man, watching his

ruddy cheek, his laughing eye, the kindness of his heart, and the dexterity of his hand in seizing his funny prey ! It must be confessed, there is often an odd sort of *materiality* in English sports and recreations. I have known several persons, whose existence consisted wholly in manual exercises, and all whose enjoyments lay at their finger-ends. Their greatest happiness was in cutting a stick, in mending a cabbage-net, in digging a hole in the ground, in hitting a mark, turning a lathe, or in something else of the same kind, at which they had a certain *knack*. Well is it when we can amuse ourselves with such trifles and without injury to others ! This class of character, which the Spectator has immortalised in the person of Will Wimble, is still common among younger brothers and gentlemen of retired incomes in town or country. The *Cockney* character is of our English growth, as this intimates a feverish fidgety delight in rural sights and sounds, and a longing wish, after the turmoil and confinement of a city-life, to transport one's-self to the freedom and breathing sweetness of a country retreat. London is half suburbs. The suburbs of Paris are a desert ; and you see nothing but crazy wind-mills, stone-walls, and a few straggling visitants in spots where in England you would find a thousand villas, a thousand terraces crowned with their own delights, or be stunned with the noise of bowling-greens and tea-gardens, or stifled with the fumes of tobacco mingling with fragrant shrubs, or the clouds of dust raised by half the population of the metropolis panting and toiling in search of a mouthful of fresh air. The Parisian is, perhaps, as well (or better) contented with himself wherever he is, stewed

in his shop or his garret ; the Londoner is miserable in these circumstances, and glad to escape from them.* Let no one object to the gloomy appearance of a London Sunday, compared with a Parisian one. It is a part of our politics and our religion : we would not have James the First's " Book of Sports " thrust down our throats : and besides, it is a part of our character to do one thing at a time, and not to be dancing a jig and on our knees in the same breath. It is true the Englishman spends his Sunday evening at the ale-house—

—“ And e'en on Sunday
Drank with Kirton Jean till Monday ”—

but he only unbends and waxes mellow by degrees, and sits soaking till he can neither sit, stand, nor go : it is his vice, and a beastly one it is, but not a proof of any inherent distaste to mirth or good-fellowship. Neither can foreigners throw the carnival in our teeth with any effect : those who have seen it (at Florence, for example) will say that it is duller than any thing in England. Our Bartholomew-Fair is Queen Mab herself to it ! What can be duller than a parcel of masks moving about the streets and looking as grave and monotonous as possible from day to day, and with the same lifeless formality in their limbs and gestures as in their features ? One might as well expect variety and spirit in a procession of waxwork. We must be hard run indeed, when we have recourse to a pasteboard proxy to set off our

* The English are fond of change of scene ; the French of change of posture ; the Italians like to sit still and do nothing.

mirth : a mask may be a very good cover for licentiousness (though of that I saw no signs), but it is a very bad exponent of wit and humour. I should suppose there is more drollery and unction in the caricatures in Gilray's shop-window, than in all the masks in Italy, without exception.*

The humour of English writing and description has often been wondered at ; and it flows from the same source as the merry *traits* of our character. A degree of barbarism and rusticity seems necessary to the perfection of humour. The droll and laughable depend on peculiarity and incongruity of character. But with the progress of refinement, the peculiarities of individuals and of classes wear out or lose their sharp, abrupt edges ; nay, a certain slowness and dulness of understanding is required to be struck with odd and unaccountable appearances, for which a greater facility of apprehension can sooner assign an explanation that breaks the force of the seeming absurdity, and to which a wider scope of imagination is more easily reconciled. Clowns and country people are more amused, are more disposed to laugh and make sport of the dress of strangers, because from their ignorance the surprise is greater, and they cannot conceive any thing to be natural or proper to which they are unused. Without a given portion of hardness and repulsiveness of feeling the ludicrous

* Bells are peculiar to England. They jingle them in Italy during the carnival as boys do with us at Shrovetide ; but they have no notion of ringing them. The sound of village bells never cheers you in travelling, nor have you the lute or cittern in their stead. The expression of " Merry Bells " is a favourite and not one of the least appropriate in our language.

cannot well exist. Wonder, and curiosity, the attributes of inexperience, enter greatly into its composition. Now it appears to me that the English are (or were) just at that mean point between intelligence and obtuseness, which must produce the most abundant and happiest crop of humour. Absurdity and singularity glide over the French mind without jarring or jostling with it ; or they evaporate in levity : with the Italians they are lost in indolence or pleasure. The ludicrous takes hold of the English imagination, and clings to it with all its ramifications. We resent any difference or peculiarity of appearance at first, and yet, having not much malice at our hearts, we are glad to turn it into a jest—we are liable to be offended, and as willing to be pleased—struck with oddity from not knowing what to make of it, we wonder and burst out a laughing at the eccentricity of others, while we follow our own bent from wilfulness or simplicity, and thus afford them, in our turn, matter for the indulgence of the comic vein. It is possible that a greater refinement of manners may give birth to finer distinctions of satire and a nicer tact for the ridiculous : but our insular situation and character are, I should say, most likely to foster, as they have in fact fostered, the greatest quantity of natural and striking humour, in spite of our plodding tenaciousness, and want both of gaiety and quickness of perception. A set of raw recruits with their awkward movements and unbending joints are laughable enough : but they cease to be so, when they have once been drilled into discipline and uniformity. So it is with nations that lose their angular points and grotesque qualities with education and inter-

course: but it is in a mixed state of manners that comic humour chiefly flourishes, for, in order that the drollery may not be lost, we must have spectators of the passing scene who are able to appreciate and embody its most remarkable features—wits as well as *butts* for ridicule. I shall mention two names in this department, which may serve to redeem the national character from absolute dulness and solemn pretence—Fielding and Hogarth. These were thorough specimens of true English humour; yet both were grave men. In reality, too high a pitch of animal spirits runs away with the imagination, instead of helping it to reach the goal; is inclined to take the jest for granted when it ought to work it out with patient and marked touches, and it ends in rapid flippancy and impertinence. Among our neighbours on the Continent, Molière and Rabelais carried the freedom of wit and humour to an almost incredible height; but they rather belonged to the old French school, and even approach and exceed the English licence and extravagance of conception. I do not consider Congreve's wit (though it belongs to us) as coming under the article here spoken of; for his genius is any thing but *merry*. Lord Byron was in the habit of railing at the spirit of our good old comedy, and of abusing Shakespear's Clowns and Fools, which he said the refinement of the French and Italian stage would not endure, and which only our grossness and puerile taste could tolerate. In this I agree with him; and it is *pat* to my purpose. I flatter myself that we are almost the only people left who understand and relish *nonsense*. We are not “merry and wise,” but indulge our mirth to excess and folly. When we trifle, we trifle

in good earnest ; and having once relaxed our hold of the helm, drift idly down the stream, and delighted with the change are tossed about " by every little breath " of whim or caprice,

" That under Heaven is blown."

All we then want is to proclaim a truce with reason, and to be pleased with as little expense of thought or pretension to wisdom as possible. This licensed fooling is carried to its very utmost length in Shakespear, and in some other of our elder dramatists, without, perhaps, sufficient warrant or the same excuse. Nothing can justify this extreme relaxation but extreme tension. Shakespear's trifling does indeed tread upon the very borders of vacancy : his meaning often hangs by the very slenderest threads. For this he might be blamed if it did not take away our breath to follow his eagle flights, or if he did not at other times make the cordage of our hearts crack. After our heads ache with thinking, it is fair to play the fool. The clowns were as proper an appendage to the gravity of our antique literature, as fools and dwarfs were to the stately dignity of courts and noble houses in former days. Of all people, they have the best right to claim a total exemption from rules and rigid formality, who, when they have any thing of importance to do, set about it with the greatest earnestness and perseverance, and are generally grave and sober to a proverb.* Poor Swift, who wrote more idle or

* The strict formality of French serious writing is resorted to as a foil to the natural levity of their character.

nonsense verses than any man, was the severest of moralists ; and his feelings and observations morbidly acute. Did not Lord Byron himself follow up his Childe Harold with his Don Juan?—not that I insist on what he did as an illustration of the English character. He was one of the English Nobility, not one of the English People ; and his occasional ease and familiarity were in my mind equally constrained and affected, whether in relation to the pretensions of his rank or the efforts of his genius.

They ask you in France, how you pass your time in England without amusements ; and can with difficulty believe that there are theatres in London, still less that they are larger and handsomer than those in Paris. That we should have comic actors, “ they own, surprises them.” They judge of the English character in the lump as one great jolter-head, containing all the stupidity of the country, as the large ball at the top of the Dispensary in Warwick-lane, from its resemblance to a gilded pill, has been made to represent the whole pharmacopœia and professional quackery of the kingdom. They have no more notion, for instance, how we should have such an actor as Liston on our stage, than if we were to tell them we have parts performed by a sea-otter ; nor if they were to see him, would they be much the wiser, or know what to think of his unaccountable twitches of countenance or nondescript gestures, of his teeth chattering in his head, his eyes that seem dropping from their sockets, his nose that is tickled by a jest as by a feather and shining with self-complacency as if oiled, his ignorant conceit, his gaping stupor, his lumpish vivacity in Lubin Log or Tony Lumpkin ; for as our

rivals do not wind up the machine to such a determined intensity of purpose, neither have they any idea of its running down to such degrees of imbecility and folly, or coming to an absolute *stand-still* and lack of meaning, nor can they enter into or be amused with the contrast. No people ever laugh heartily who can give a reason for their doing so: and I believe the English in general are not yet in this predicament. They are not metaphysical, but very much in a state of nature; and this is one main ground why I give them credit for being merry, notwithstanding appearances. Their mirth is not the mirth of vice or desperation, but of innocence and a native wildness. They do not cavil or boggle at niceties, and not merely come to the edge of a joke, but break their necks over it with a wanton "Here goes," where others make a *pirouette* and stand upon decorum. The French cannot, however, be persuaded of the excellence of our comic stage, nor of the store we set by it. When they ask what amusements we have, it is plain they can never have heard of Mrs. Jordan, nor King, nor Bannister, nor Suett, nor Munden, nor Lewis, nor little Simmons, nor Dodd, and Parsons, and Emery, and Miss Pope, and Miss Farren, and all those who even in my time have gladdened a nation and "made life's business like a summer's dream." Can I think of them, and of their names that glittered in the play-bills when I was young, exciting all the flutter of hope and expectation of seeing them in their favourite parts of Nell, or Little Pickle, or Touchstone, or Sir Peter Teazle, or Lenitive in the Prize, or Lingo, or Crabtree, or Nipperkin, or old Dornton, or Ranger, or the Copper Captain, or

Lord Sands, or Filch, or Moses, or Sir Andrew Aguecheek, or Acres, or Elbow, or Hodge, or Flora, or the Duenna, or Lady Teazle, or Lady Grace, or of the gaiety that sparkled in all eyes, and the delight that overflowed all hearts, as they glanced before us in these parts,

“Throwing a gaudy shadow upon life,”—

and not feel my heart yearn within me, or couple the thoughts of England and the spleen together? Our cloud has at least its rainbow tints; ours is not one long polar night of cold and dulness, but we have the gleaming lights of fancy to amuse us, the household fires of truth and genius to warm us. We can go to a play and see Liston; or stay at home and read Roderick Random; or have Hogarth’s prints of *Marriage à la Mode* hanging round our room. “Tut! there’s livers even in England,” as well as “out of it.” We are not quite the *forlorn hope* of humanity, the last of nations. The French look at us across the Channel, and seeing nothing but water and a cloudy mist, think that this is England—

—“What’s our Britain
In the world’s volume? In a great pool a swan’s nest.”

If they have any farther idea of us, it is of George III. and our Jack tars, the House of Lords and House of Commons, and this is no great addition to us. To go beyond this, to talk of arts and elegances as having taken up their abode here, or to say that Mrs. Abington was equal to Mademoiselle Mars, and that we at one time got up the “School for Scandal,” as they do the “Misan-

thropy," is to persuade them that Iceland is a pleasant summer-retreat, or to recommend the whale-fishery as a classical amusement. The French are the *cockneys* of Europe, and have no idea how any one can exist out of Paris, or be alive without incessant grimace and *jabber*. Yet what imports it? What! though the joyous train I have just enumerated were, perhaps, never heard of in the precincts of the Palais-Royal, is it not enough that they gave pleasure where they were, to those who saw and heard them? Must our laugh, to be sincere, have its echo on the other side of the water? Had not the French their favourites and their enjoyments at the time, that we knew nothing of? Why then should we not have ours (and boast of them too) without their leave? A monopoly of self-conceit is not a monopoly of all other advantages. The English, when they go abroad, do not take away the prejudice against them by their looks. We seem duller and sadder than we are. As I write this, I am sitting in the open air in a beautiful valley, near Vevy: Clarens is on my left, the Dent de Jamant is behind me, the rocks of Meillerie opposite: under my feet is a green bank, enamelled with white and purple flowers, in which a dew-drop here and there still glitters with pearly light:

“ And gaudy butterflies flutter around.”

Intent upon the scene and upon the thoughts that stir within me, I conjure up the cheerful passages of my life, and a crowd of happy images appear before me. No one would see it in my looks—my eyes grow dull and fixed,

and I seem rooted to the spot, as all this phantasmagoria passes in review before me, glancing a reflex lustre on the face of the world and nature. But the traces of pleasure, in my case, sink into an absorbent ground, of thoughtful melancholy, and require to be brought out by time and circumstances, or (as the critics tell you) by the *varnish of style*!

The *comfort*, on which the English lay so much stress, is of the same character, and arises from the same source as their mirth. Both exist by contrast and a sort of contradiction. The English are certainly the most uncomfortable of all people in themselves, and therefore it is that they stand in need of every kind of comfort and accommodation. The least thing puts them out of their way, and therefore every thing must be in its place. They are mightily offended at disagreeable tastes and smells, and therefore they exact the utmost neatness and nicety. They are sensible of heat and cold, and therefore they cannot exist, unless every thing is snug and warm, or else open and airy, where they are. They must have "all appliances and means to boot." They are afraid of interruption and intrusion, and therefore they shut themselves up in in-door enjoyments and by their own firesides. It is not that they require luxuries (for that implies a high degree of epicurean indulgence and gratification), but they cannot do without *their comforts*; that is, whatever tends to supply their physical wants, and ward off physical pain and annoyance. As they have not a fund of animal spirits and enjoyments in themselves, they cling to external objects for support, and derive solid satisfaction from the ideas of order, cleanliness, plenty,

property, and domestic quiet, as they seek for diversion from odd accidents and grotesque surprises, and have the highest possible relish not of voluptuous softness, but of hard knocks and dry blows, as one means of ascertaining their personal identity.

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ON A SUN-DIAL

“ To carve out dials quaintly, point by point.”

SHAKESPEAR.

Horas non numero nisi serenas—is the motto of a sun-dial near Venice. There is a softness and a harmony in the words and in the thought unparalleled. Of all conceits it is surely the most classical. “ I count only the hours that are serene.” What a bland and care-dispelling feeling ! How the shadows seem to fade on the dial-plate as the sky hours, and time presents only a blank unless as its progress is marked by what is joyous, and all that is not happy sinks into oblivion ? What a fine lesson is conveyed to the mind—to take no note of time but by its benefits, to watch only for the smiles and neglect the frowns of fate, to compose our lives of bright and gentle moments, turning always to the sunny side of things, and letting the rest slip from our imaginations, unheeded or forgotten ! How different from the common art of self-tormenting ! For myself, as I rode along the Brenta, while the sun shone hot upon its sluggish, slimy waves, my sensations were far from comfortable ; but the reading this inscription on the side of a glaring wall in an instant restored me to myself ; and still, whenever I think of or repeat it, it has the power of wafting me into the region of pure and blissful abstraction. I cannot

elp fancying it to be a legend of Popish superstition. Some monk of the dark ages must have invented and bequeathed it to us, who, loitering in trim gardens and watching the silent march of time, as his fruits ripened in the sun or his flowers scented the balmy air, felt a mild languor pervade his senses, and having little to do or to care for, determined (in imitation of his sun-dial) to efface that little from his thoughts or draw a veil over it, making of his life one long dream of quiet ! *Horas non numero nisi serenas*—he might repeat, when the heavens were overcast and the gathering storm scattered the falling leaves, and turn to his books and wrap himself in his golden studies ! Out of some such mood of mind, indolent, elegant, thoughtful, this exquisite device (speaking volumes) must have originated.

Of the several modes of counting time, that by the sun-dial is perhaps the most apposite and striking, if not the most convenient or comprehensive. It does not obtrude its observations, though it “morals on the time,” and, by its stationary character, forms contrast to the most fleeting of all essences. It stands *sub dio*—under the marble air, and there is some connexion between the image of infinity and eternity. I should also like to have a sun-flower growing near it with bees fluttering round.* It should be of iron to denote duration, and have a dull, leaden look. I hate a sun-dial made of wood, which is rather calculated to show the variations of the seasons, than the progress of time, slow, silent, imperceptible,

* Is this a verbal fallacy ? Or in the close, retired, sheltered scene which I have imagined to myself, is not the sun-flower a natural accompaniment of the sun-dial ?

chequered with light and shade. If our hours were all serene, we might probably take almost as little note of them, as the dial does of those that are clouded. It is the shadow thrown across, that gives us warning of their flight. Otherwise, our impressions would take the same undistinguishable hue ; we should scarce be conscious of our existence. Those who have had none of the cares of this life to harass and disturb them, have been obliged to have recourse to the hopes and fears of the next to enliven the prospect before them. Most of the methods for measuring the lapse of time have, I believe, been the contrivance of monks and religious recluses, who, finding time hang heavy on their hands, were at some pains to see how they got rid of it. The hour-glass is, I suspect, an older invention ; and it is certainly the most defective of all. Its creeping sands are not indeed an unapt emblem of the minute, countless portions of our existence; and the manner in which they gradually slide through the hollow glass and diminish in number till not a single one is left, also illustrates the way in which our years slip from us by stealth : but as a mechanical invention, it is rather a hindrance than a help, for it requires to have the time, of which it pretends to count the precious moments, taken up in attention to itself, and in seeing that when one end of the glass is empty, we turn it round, in order that it may go on again, or else all our labour is lost, and we must wait for some other mode of ascertaining the time before we can recover our reckoning and proceed as before. The philosopher in his cell, the cottager at her spinning-wheel must, however, find an invaluable acquisition in this “ companion of the lonely

hour," as it has been called,* which not only serves to tell how the time goes, but to fill up its vacancies. What a treasure must not the little box seem to hold, as if it were a sacred deposit of the very grains and fleeting sands of life ! What a business, in lieu of other more important avocations, to see it out to the last sand, and then to renew the process again on the instant, that there may not be the least flaw or error in the account ! What a strong sense must be brought home to the mind of the value and irrecoverable nature of the time that is fled ; what a thrilling, incessant consciousness of the slippery tenure by which we hold what remains of it ! Our very existence must seem crumbling to atoms, and running down (without a miraculous reprieve) to the last fragment. "Dust to dust and ashes to ashes" is a text that might be fairly inscribed on an hour-glass : it is ordinarily associated with the scythe of Time and a Death's-head, as a *Memento mori* ; and has, no doubt, furnished many a tacit hint to the apprehensive and visionary enthusiast in favour of a resurrection to another life !

The French give a different turn to things, less *sombre* and less edifying. A common and also a very pleasing ornament to a clock, in Paris, is a figure of Time seated in a boat which Cupid is rowing along, with the motto, *L'Amour fait passer le Tems*—which the wits again have travestied into *Le Tems fait passer L'Amour*. All this is ingenious and well ; but it wants sentiment. I like a people who have something that they love and something

* "Once more, companion of the lonely hour,
I'll turn thee up again."

Bloomfield's Poems—The Widow to her Hour-glass.

that they hate, and with whom every thing is not alike a matter of indifference or *pour passer le tems*. The French attach no importance to any thing, except for the moment ; they are only thinking how they shall get rid of one sensation for another ; all their ideas are *in transitu*. Every thing is detached, nothing is accumulated. It would be a million of years before a Frenchman would think of the *Horas non numero nisi serenas*. Its impassioned repose and *ideal* voluptuousness are as far from their breasts as the poetry of that line in Shakespear —“ How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon that bank ! ” They never arrive at the classical—or the romantic. They blow the bubbles of vanity, fashion, and pleasure ; but they do not expand their perceptions into refinement, or strengthen them into solidity. Where there is nothing fine in the ground-work of the imagination, nothing fine in the superstructure can be produced. They are light, airy, fanciful (to give them their due)—but when they attempt to be serious (beyond mere good sense) they are either dull or extravagant. When the volatile salt has flown off, nothing but a *caput mortuum* remains. They have infinite crotchetts and caprices with their clocks and watches, which seem made for any thing but to tell the hour—gold-repeaters, watches with metal covers, clocks with hands to count the seconds. There is no escaping from quackery and impertinence, even in our attempts to calculate the waste of time. The years gallop fast enough for me, without remarking every moment as it flies ; and farther, I must say I dislike a watch (whether of French or English manufacture) that comes to me like a footpad with its face muffled, and does not present its

clear, open aspect like a friend, and point with its finger to the time of day. All this opening and shutting of dull, heavy cases (under pretence that the glass-lid is liable to be broken, or lets in the dust or air and obstructs the movement of the watch) is not to husband time, but to give trouble. It is mere pomposity and self-importance, like consulting a mysterious oracle that one carries about with one in one's pocket, instead of asking a common question of an acquaintance or companion. There are two clocks which strike the hour in the room where I am. This I do not like. In the first place, I do not want to be reminded twice how the time goes (it is like the second tap of a saucy servant at your door when perhaps you have no wish to get up) : in the next place, it is starting a difference of opinion on the subject, and I am averse to every appearance of wrangling and disputation. Time moves on the same, whatever disparity there may be in our mode of keeping count of it, like true fame in spite of the cavils and contradictions of the critics. I am no friend to repeating watches. The only pleasant association I have with them is the account given by Rousseau of some French lady, who sat up reading the *New Heloise* when it first came out, and ordering her maid to sound the repeater, found it was too late to go to bed, and continued reading on till morning. Yet how different is the interest excited by this story from the account which Rousseau somewhere else gives of his sitting up with his father reading romances, when a boy, till they were startled by the swallows twittering in their nests at day-break, and the father cried out, half angry and ashamed—" *Allons, mon fils ; je suis plus*

enfant que toi !” In general, I have heard repeating watches sounded in stage-coaches at night, when some fellow-traveller suddenly awaking and wondering what was the hour, another has very deliberately taken out his watch, and pressing the spring, it has counted out the time ; each petty stroke acting like a sharp puncture on the ear, and informing me of the dreary hours I had already passed, and of the more dreary ones I had to wait till morning.

The great advantage, it is true, which clocks have over watches and other dumb reckoners of time is, that for the most part they strike the hour—that they are as it were the mouth-pieces of time ; that they not only point it to the eye, but impress it on the ear ; that they “ lend it both an understanding and a tongue.” Time thus speaks to us in an audible and warning voice. Objects of sight are easily distinguished by the sense, and suggest useful reflections to the mind ; sounds, from their intermittent nature, and perhaps other causes, appeal more to the imagination, and strike upon the heart. But to do this, they must be unexpected and involuntary—there must be no trick in the case—they should not be squeezed out with a finger and a thumb ; there should be nothing optional, personal in their occurrence ; they should be like stern, inflexible monitors, that nothing can prevent from discharging their duty. Surely, if there is any thing with which we should not mix up our vanity and self-consequence, it is with Time, the most independent of all things. All the sublimity, all the superstition that hang upon this palpable mode of announcing its flight, are chiefly attached to this circumstance. Time

would lose its abstracted character, if we kept it like a curiosity or a jack-in-a-box ; its prophetic warnings would have no effect, if it obviously spoke only at our prompting, like a paltry ventriloquism. The clock that tells the coming, dreaded hour—the castle bell, that “ with its brazen throat and iron tongue, sounds one unto the drowsy ear of night ”—the curfew, “ swinging slow with sullen roar ” o’er wizard stream or fountain, are like a voice from other worlds, big with unknown events. The last sound, which is still kept up as an old custom in many parts of England, is a great favourite with me. I used to hear it when a boy. It tells a tale of other times. The days that are past, the generations that are gone, the tangled forest glades and hamlets brown of my native country, the woodsman’s art, the Norman warrior armed for the battle or in his festive hall, the conqueror’s iron rule and peasant’s lamp extinguished, all start up at the clamorous peal, and fill my mind with fear and wonder. I confess, nothing at present interests me but what has been—the recollection of the impressions of my early life, or events long past, of which only the dim traces remain in a smouldering ruin or half-obsolete custom. That *things should be that are now no more*, creates in my mind the most unfeigned astonishment. I cannot solve the mystery of the past, nor exhaust my pleasure in it. The years, the generations to come, are nothing to me. We care no more about the world in the year 2300 than we do about one of the planets. Even George IV. is better than the Earl of Windsor. We might as well make a voyage to the moon as think of stealing a march upon Time with impunity.

De non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est ratio.
Those who are to come after us and push us from the stage seem like upstarts and pretenders, that may be said to exist *in vacuo*, we know not upon what, except as they are blown up with vain and self conceit by their patrons among the moderns. But the ancients are true and *bonâ-fide* people, to whom we are bound by aggregate knowledge and filial ties, and in whom seen by the mellow light of history we feel our own existence doubted and our pride consoled, as we ruminate on the vestiges of the past. The public in general, however, do not carry this speculative indifference about the future to what is to happen to themselves, or to the part they are to act in the busy scene. For my own part, I do ; and the only wish I can form, or that ever prompts the passing sigh, would be to live some of my years over again—they would be those in which I enjoyed and suffered most !

The ticking of a clock in the night has nothing very interesting nor very alarming in it, though superstition has magnified it into an omen. In a state of vigilance or debility, it preys upon the spirits like the persecution of a teasing pertinacious insect ; and haunting the imagination after it has ceased in reality, is converted into the death-watch. Time is rendered vast by contemplating its minute portions thus repeatedly and painfully urged upon our attention, as the ocean in its immensity is composed of water-drops. A clock striking with a clear and silver sound is a great relief in such circumstances, breaks the spell, and resembles a sylph-like and friendly spirit in the room. Foreigners, with all their tricks and contrivances upon clocks and time-

pieces, are strangers to the sound of village-bells, though perhaps a people that can dance may dispense with them. They impart a pensive, wayward pleasure to the mind, and are a kind of chronology of happy events, often serious in the retrospect—births, marriages, and so forth. Coleridge calls them “ the poor man’s only music.” A village spire in England peeping from its cluster of trees is always associated in imagination with this cheerful accompaniment, and may be expected to pour its joyous tidings on the gale. In Catholic countries, you are stunned with the everlasting tolling of bells to prayers or for the dead. In the Apennines, and other wild and mountainous districts of Italy, the little chapel-bell with its simple tinkling sound has a romantic and charming effect. The Monks in former times appear to have taken a pride in the construction of bells as well as churches ; and some of those of the great cathedrals abroad (as at Cologne and Rouen) may be fairly said to be hoarse with counting the flight of ages. The chimes in Holland are a nuisance. They dance in the hours and the quarters. They leave no respite to the imagination. Before one set has done ringing in your ears, another begins. You do not know whether the hours move or stand still, go backwards or forwards, so fantastical and perplexing are their accompaniments. Time is a more staid personage, and not so full of gambols. It puts you in mind of a tune with variations, or of an embroidered dress. Surely, nothing is more simple than time. His march is straightforward ; but we should have leisure allowed us to look back upon the distance we have come, and not be counting his steps every

moment. Time in Holland is a foolish old fellow with all the antics of a youth, who “goes to church in a coranto, and lights his pipe in a cinque-pace.” The chimes with us, on the contrary, as they come in every three or four hours, are like stages in the journey of the day. They give a fillip to the lazy, creeping hours, and relieve the lassitude of country-places. At noon, their desultory, trivial song is diffused through the hamlet with the odour of rashers of bacon ; at the close of day they send the toil-worn sleepers to their beds. Their discontinuance would be a great loss to the thinking or unthinking public. Mr. Wordsworth has painted their effect on the mind when he makes his friend Matthew, in a fit of inspired dotage :

“ Sing those witty rhymes
About the crazy old church-clock
And the bewilder’d chimes.”

The tolling of the bell for deaths and executions is a fearful summons, though, as it announces, not the advance of time but the approach of fate, it happily makes no part of our subject. Otherwise, the “sound of the bell” for Macheath’s execution in the “Beggar’s Opera,” or for that of the Conspirators in “Venice Preserved,” with the roll of the drum at a soldier’s funeral, and a digression to that of my Uncle Toby, as it is so finely described by Sterne, would furnish amply topics to descant upon. If I were a moralist, I might disapprove the ringing in the new and ringing out the old year.

“ Why dance ye, mortals, o'er the grave of Time ? ”

St. Paul’s bell tolls only for the death of our English kings, or a distinguished personage or two, with long intervals between.*

Those who have no artificial means of ascertaining the progress of time, are in general the most acute in discerning its immediate signs, and are most retentive of individual dates. The mechanical aids to knowledge are not sharpeners of the wits. The understanding of a savage is a kind of natural almanac, and more true in its prognostication of the future. In his mind’s eye he sees what has happened or what is likely to happen to him, “ as in a map the voyager his course.” Those who read the times and seasons in the aspect of the heavens and the configurations of the stars, who count by moons and know when the sun rises and sets, are by no means ignorant of their own affairs or of the common concatenation of events. People in such situations have not their faculties distracted by any multiplicity of inquiries beyond what befalls themselves, and the outward appearances that mark the change. There is, therefore, a simplicity and clearness in the knowledge they possess, which often puzzles the more learned. I am sometimes surprised at a shepherd-boy by the road-side, who sees nothing but the earth and sky, asking me the time of day —he ought to know so much better than any one how far the sun is above the horizon. I suppose he wants to ask

* Rousseau has admirably described the effect of bells on the imagination in a passage in the Confessions, beginning “ *Le son des cloches m’a toujours singulièrement affecté,* ” &c.

a question of a passenger, or to see if he has a watch. Robinson Crusoe lost his reckoning in the monotony of his life and that bewildering dream of solitude, and was fain to have recourse to the notches in a piece of wood. What a diary was his ! And how time must have spread its circuit round him, vast and pathless as the ocean !

For myself, I have never had a watch nor any other mode of keeping time in my possession, nor ever wish to learn how time goes. It is a sign I have had little to do, few avocations, few engagements. When I am in a town, I can hear the clock ; and when I am in the country, I can listen to the silence. What I like best is to lie whole mornings on a sunny bank on Salisbury Plain, without any object before me, neither knowing nor caring how time passes, and thus " with light-winged toys of feathered Idleness " to melt down hours to moments. Perhaps some such thoughts as I have here set down float before me like motes before my half-shut eyes, or some vivid image of the past by forcible contrast rushes by me—" Diana and her fawn, and all the glories of the antique world ;" then I start away to prevent the iron from entering my soul, and let fall some tears into that stream of time which separates me farther and farther from all I once loved ! At length I rouse myself from my reverie, and home to dinner, proud of killing time with thought, nay even without thinking. Somewhat of this idle humour I inherit from my father, though he had not the same freedom from *ennui*, for he was not a metaphysician ; and there were stops and vacant intervals in his being which he did not know how to fill

up. He used in these cases, and as an obvious resource, carefully to wind up his watch at night, and "with lack-lustre eye" more than once in the course of the day look to see what o'clock it was. Yet he had nothing else in his character in common with the elder Mr. Shandy. Were I to attempt a sketch of him, for my own or the reader's satisfaction, it would be after the following manner:—but now I recollect, I have done something of the kind once before, and were I to resume the subject here, some bat or owl of a critic, with spectacled gravity, might swear I had stolen the whole of the *Essay* from myself—or (what is worse) from him! So I had better let it go as it is.

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ON GOING A JOURNEY

ONE of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey ; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room ; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.

“ The fields his study, nature was his book.”

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticising hedge-rows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places, and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room, and fewer incumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude ; nor do I ask for

—“ a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet.”

The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences ; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others.

It is because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation

“ May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair’d,”

that I absent myself from the town for awhile, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a postchaise or in a Tilbury, to exchange good things with, and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours’ march to dinner—and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things, like “ sunken wrack and sumless treasures,” burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or dull common-places, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do ; but I sometimes had rather be without them. “ Leave, oh, leave me to my repose ! ” I have just now other business in hand, which would seem idle to you, but is with me “ very stuff of the conscience.”

Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment ? Does not this daisy leap to my heart set in its coat of emerald ? Yet if I were to explain to you the circumstance that has so endeared it to me, you would only smile. Had I not better then keep it to myself, and let it serve me to brood over, from here to yonder craggy point, and from thence onward to the far-distant horizon ? I should be but bad company all that way, and therefore prefer being alone. I have heard it said that you may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself, and indulge your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party. "Out upon such half-faced fellowship," say I. I like to be either entirely to myself, or entirely at the disposal of others ; to talk or be silent, to walk or sit still, to be sociable or solitary. I was pleased with an observation of Mr. Cobbett's, that "he thought it a bad French custom to drink our wine with our meals, and that an Englishman ought to do only one thing at a time." So I cannot talk and think, or indulge in melancholy musing and lively conversation by fits and starts. "Let me have a companion of my way," says Sterne, "were it but to remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun declines." It is beautifully said : but in my opinion, this continual comparing of notes interferes with the involuntary impression of things upon the mind, and hurts the sentiment. If you only hint what you feel in a kind of dumb show, it is insipid : if you have to explain it, it is making a toil of a pleasure. You cannot read the book of nature, without being perpetually put

to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of others. I am for the synthetical method on a journey, in preference to the analytical. I am content to lay in a stock of ideas then, and to examine and anatomise them afterwards. I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze, and not to have them entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy. For once, I like to have it all my own way ; and this is impossible unless you are alone, or in such company as I do not covet. I have no objection to argue a point with any one for twenty miles of measured road, but not for pleasure. If you remark the scent of a beanfield crossing the road, perhaps your fellow-traveller has no smell. If you point to a distant object, perhaps he is short-sighted, and has to take out his glass to look at it. There is a feeling in the air, a tone in the colour of a cloud which hits your fancy, but the effect of which you are unable to account for. There is then no sympathy, but an uneasy craving after it, and a dissatisfaction which pursues you on the way, and in the end probably produces ill humour. Now I never quarrel with myself, and take all my own conclusions for granted till I find it necessary to defend them against objections. It is not merely that you may not be of accord on the objects and circumstances that present themselves before you—these may recal a number of objects, and lead to associations too delicate and refined to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and sometimes still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To give way to our feelings before company, seems extravagance or affectation ;

and on the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every turn, and to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not answered) is a task to which few are competent. We must "give it an understanding, but no tongue." My old friend C[oleridge], however, could do both. He could go on in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale, a summer's day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. "He talked far above singing." If I could so clothe my ideas in sounding and flowing words, I might perhaps wish to have some one with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could be more content, were it possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the woods of All-Foxden. They had "that fine madness in them which our first poets had"; and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument, would have breathed such strains as the following.

— "Here be woods as green
As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet
As when smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet
Face of the curled stream, with flow'rs as many
As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;
Here be all new delights, cool streams and wells,
Arbours o'ergreen with woodbine, caves and dells;
Choose where thou wilt, while I sit by and sing,
Or gather rushes to make many a ring
For thy long fingers; tell thee tales of love,
How the pale Phœbe, hunting in a grove,
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
She took eternal fire that never dies;

How she convey'd him softly in a sleep,
His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,
Gilding the mountain with her brother's light,
To kiss her sweetest." —

FAITHFUL SHEPHERDESS.

Had I words and images at command like these, I would attempt to wake the thoughts that lie slumbering on golden ridges in the evening clouds: but at the sight of nature my fancy, poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves, like flowers at sunset. I can make nothing out on the spot:—I must have time to collect myself.—

In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects: it should be reserved for Table-talk. L[amb] is for this reason, I take it, the worst company in the world out of doors; because he is the best within. I grant, there is one subject on which it is pleasant to talk on a journey; and that is, what one shall have for supper when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation, by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavour of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted just at the approach of night-fall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to "take one's ease at one's inn!" These eventful moments in our lives' history are too precious, too full of solid, heartfelt happiness to be frittered and dribbled

away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop: they will do to talk of or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking whole goblets of tea,

“ The cups that cheer, but not inebriate,”

and letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall have for supper—eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal-cutlet! Sancho in such a situation once fixed upon cow-heel; and his choice, though he could not help it, is not to be disparaged. Then in the intervals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, to catch the preparation and the stir in the kitchen—*Procul, O procul este profani!* These hours are sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; he is a part of the furniture and costume of an inn. If he is a Quaker, or from the West Riding of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to sympathise with him, and he breaks no squares. I associate nothing with my travelling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of me and my affairs, I in a manner forget myself. But a friend reminds one of other things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He comes in ungraciously between

us and our imaginary character. Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits ; or from having some one with you that knows the less sublime portions of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen of the world : but your “ unhoused free condition is put into circumscription and confine.” The *incognito* of an inn is one of its striking privileges—“ lord of one’s-self, unumber’d with a name.” Oh ! it is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion—to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties—to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweet-breads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening—and no longer seeking for applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than *the Gentleman in the parlour* ! One may take one’s choice of all characters in this romantic state of uncertainty as to one’s real pretensions, and become indefinitely respectable and negatively right-worshipful. We baffle prejudice and disappoint conjecture ; and from being so to others, begin to be objects of curiosity and wonder even to ourselves. We are no more those hackneyed common-places that we appear in the world : an inn restores us to the level of nature, and quits scores with society ! I have certainly spent some enviable hours at inns—sometimes when I have been left entirely to myself, and have tried to solve some metaphysical problem, as once at Witham-common, where I found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas—at other times, when there have

been pictures in the room, as at St. Neot's (I think it was), where I first met with Gribelin's engravings of the Cartoons, into which I entered at once, and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall's drawings, which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn, standing up in the boat between me and the twilight—at other times I might mention luxuriating in books, with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read *Paul and Virginia*, which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madame D'Arblay's *Camilla*. It was on the tenth of April, 1798, that I sat down to a volume of the *New Eloise*, at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. The letter I chose was that in which St. Preux describes his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the *Pays de Vaud*, which I had brought with me as a *bon bouche* to crown the evening with. It was my birth-day, and I had for the first time come from a place in the neighbourhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham; and on passing a certain point, you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with "green upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks" below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time "glittered green with sunny showers," and a budding ash-tree

dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk along the high road that overlooks the delicious prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr. Coleridge's poems ! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, LIBERTY, GENIUS, LOVE, VIRTUE ; which have since faded into the light of common day, or mock my idle gaze.

“ The beautiful is vanished, and returns not.”

Still I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot ; but I would return to it alone. What other self could I find to share that influx of thoughts, of regret, and delight, the fragments of which I could hardly conjure up to myself, so much have they been broken and defaced ! I could stand on some tall rock, and overlook the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now ? Not only I myself have changed ; the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, in joy, in youth and gladness as thou then wert ; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink of the waters of life freely !

There is hardly any thing that shows the short-sightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than travelling does. With change of place we change

our ideas ; nay, our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort indeed transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the mind revives again ; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions, we only shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye, we take our fill of it, and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on, and think no more of it : the horizon that shuts it from our sight, also blots it from our memory like a dream. In travelling through a wild barren country, I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget the town, and in town we despise the country. " *Beyond Hyde Park,*" says Sir Fopling Flutter, " all is a desert." All that part of the map that we do not see before us is a blank. The world in our conceit of it is not much bigger than a nutshell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, county joined to county, kingdom to kingdom, lands to seas, making an image voluminous and vast ;— the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written in a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For instance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population, known by the name of China to us ? An inch of paste-board on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange ! Things near us

are seen of the size of life: things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even comprehend the texture of our own being only piece-meal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same time excludes all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived and with which we have intimate associations, every one must have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression: we remember circumstances, feelings, persons, faces, names, that we had not thought of for years; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten!—To return to the question I have quitted above.

I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, but rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters, and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt. Salisbury Plain is barren of criticism, but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration always is where we shall go to: in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. “The mind is its own place;”

nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honours indifferently well to works of art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean *éclat*—shewed them that seat of the Muses at a distance,

“ With glistening spires and pinnacles adorn’d ”—

descanted on the learned air that breathes from the grassy quadrangles and stone walls of halls and colleges —was at home in the Bodleian ; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powdered Ciceroni that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to common-place beauties in matchless pictures.—As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishman to foreign manners and notions that requires the assistance of social sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen : there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome that claims the utterance of speech ; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite to all one’s ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by one’s-self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support.—Yet

I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set my foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears ; nor did the mariners' hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I only breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over " the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France," erect and satisfied ; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones : I was at no loss for language, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled ; nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French people !—There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else : but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference, and, like a dream or another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but a momentary hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity ; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must " jump " all our present comforts and connexions. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad. In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and in one sense

instructive ; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own country. We are lost to ourselves, as well as our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings,

“ Out of my country and myself I go.”

Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recal them : but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could any where borrow another life to spend afterwards at home !—

The New Monthly Magazine, October 1827.
Table Talk, Vol. II., 1822.

MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETS

MY father was a Dissenting Minister, at Wem, in Shropshire ; and in the year 1798 (the figures that compose the date are to me like the “dreaded name of Demogorgon ”) Mr. Coleridge came to Shrewsbury, to succeed Mr. Rowe in the spiritual charge of a Unitarian Congregation there. He did not come till late on the Saturday afternoon before he was to preach ; and Mr. Rowe, who himself went down to the coach, in a state of anxiety and expectation, to look for the arrival of his successor, could find no one at all answering the description but a round-faced man, in a short black coat (like a shooting-jacket) which hardly seemed to have been made for him, but who seemed to be talking at a great rate to his fellow passengers. Mr. Rowe had scarce returned to give an account of his disappointment when the round-faced man in black entered, and dissipated all doubts on the subject by beginning to talk. He did not cease while he stayed ; nor has he since, that I know of. He held the good town of Shrewsbury in delightful suspense for three weeks that he remained there, “ fluttering the *proud Salopians*, like an eagle in a dove-cote ” ; and the Welch mountains that skirt the horizon with their tempestuous confusion, agree to have heard no such mystic sounds since the days of

“ High-born Hoel’s harp or soft Llewellyn’s lay.”

As we passed along between Wem and Shrewsbury, and I eyed their blue tops seen through the wintry branches, or the red rustling leaves of the sturdy oak-trees by the road-side, a sound was in my ears as of a Syren's song ; I was stunned, startled with it, as from deep sleep ; but I had no notion then that I should ever be able to express my admiration to others in motley imagery or quaint allusion, till the light of his genius shone into my soul, like the sun's rays glittering in the puddles of the road. I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the way-side, crushed, bleeding, lifeless ; but now, bursting the deadly bands that bound them,

“ With Styx nine times round them,”

my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes, catch the golden light of other years. My soul has indeed remained in its original bondage, dark, obscure, with longings infinite and unsatisfied ; my heart, shut up in the prison-house of this rude clay, has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to ; but that my understanding also did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge. But this is not to my purpose.

My father lived ten miles from Shrewsbury, and was in the habit of exchanging visits with Mr. Rowe, and with Mr. Jenkins of Whitchurch (nine miles farther on), according to the custom of Dissenting Ministers in each other's neighbourhood. A line of communication is thus

established, by which the flame of civil and religious liberty is kept alive, and nourishes its smouldering fire unquenchable, like the fires in the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus, placed at different stations, that waited for ten long years to announce with their blazing pyramids the destruction of Troy. Coleridge had agreed to come over and see my father, according to the courtesy of the country, as Mr. Rowe's probable successor; but in the meantime, I had gone to hear him preach the Sunday after his arrival. A poet and a philosopher getting up into a Unitarian pulpit to preach the gospel, was a romance in these degenerate days, a sort of revival of the primitive spirit of Christianity, which was not to be resisted.

It was in January of 1798, that I rose one morning before daylight, to walk ten miles in the mud, to hear this celebrated person preach. Never, the longest day I have to live, shall I have such another walk as this cold, raw, comfortless one, in the winter of the year 1798. *Il y a des impressions que ni le temps ni les circonstances peuvent effacer. Dussé-je vivre des siècles entiers, le doux temps de ma jeunesse ne peut renaitre pour moi, ni s'effacer jamais dans ma mémoire.* When I got there, the organ was playing the 100th Psalm, and when it was done, Mr. Coleridge rose and gave out his text, "And he went up into the mountain to pray, HIMSELF, ALONE." As he gave out this text, his voice "rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes," and when he came to the two last words, which he pronounced loud, deep, and distinct, it seemed to me, who was then young, as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and

as if that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe. The idea of St. John came into my mind, “ of one crying in the wilderness, who had his loins girt about, and whose food was locusts and wild honey.” The preacher then launched into his subject, like an eagle dallying with the wind. The sermon was upon peace and war; upon church and state—not their alliance but their separation—on the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christianity, not as the same, but as opposed to one another. He talked of those who had “ inscribed the cross of Christ on banners dripping with human gore.” He made a poetical and pastoral excursion—and to show the fatal effects of war, drew a striking contrast between the simple shepherd-boy, driving his team afield, or sitting under the hawthorn, piping to his flock, “ as though he should never be old,” and the same poor country lad, crimped, kidnapped, brought into town, made drunk at an alehouse, turned into a wretched drummer-boy, with his hair sticking on end with powder and pomatum, a long cue at his back, and tricked out in the loathsome finery of the profession of blood :

“ Such were the notes our once-loved poet sung.”

And for myself, I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and Philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion. This was even beyond my hopes. I returned home well satisfied. The sun that was still labouring

pale and wan through the sky, obscured by thick mists, seemed an emblem of the *good cause*; and the cold dank drops of dew, that hung half melted on the beard of the thistle, had something genial and refreshing in them; for there was a spirit of hope and youth in all nature, that turned everything into good. The face of nature had not then the brand of *Jus Divinum* on it:

“Like to that sanguine flower inscrib’d with woe.”

On the Tuesday following, the half-inspired speaker came. I was called down into the room where he was, and went half-hoping, half-afraid. He received me very graciously, and I listened for a long time without uttering a word. I did not suffer in his opinion by my silence. “For those two hours,” he afterwards was pleased to say, “he was conversing with William Hazlitt’s forehead!” His appearance was different from what I had anticipated from seeing him before. At a distance, and in the dim light of the chapel, there was to me a strange wildness in his aspect, a dusky obscurity, and I thought him pitted with the small-pox. His complexion was at that time clear, and even bright—

“As are the children of yon azure sheen.”

His forehead was broad and high, light as if built of ivory, with large projecting eyebrows, and his eyes rolling beneath them, like a sea with darkened lustre. “A certain tender bloom his face o’erspread,” a purple tinge as we see it in the pale thoughtful complexions

of the Spanish portrait-painters, Murillo and Valasquez. His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent ; his chin good-humoured and round ; but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he has done. It might seem that the genius of his face as from a height surveyed and projected him (with sufficient capacity and huge aspiration) into the world unknown of thought and imagination, with nothing to support or guide his veering purpose, as if Columbus had launched his adventurous course for the New World in a scallop, without oars or compass. So, at least, I comment on it after the event. Coleridge, in his person, was rather above the common size, inclining to the corpulent, or like Lord Hamlet, "somewhat fat and pursy." His hair (now, alas ! grey) was then black and glossy as the raven's, and fell in smooth masses over his forehead. This long pendulous hair is peculiar to enthusiasts, to those whose minds tend heavenward ; and is traditionally inseparable (though of a different colour) from the pictures of Christ. It ought to belong, as a character, to all who preach *Christ crucified*, and Coleridge was at that time one of those !

It was curious to observe the contrast between him and my father, who was a veteran in the cause, and then declining into the vale of years. He had been a poor Irish lad, carefully brought up by his parents, and sent to the University of Glasgow (where he studied under Adam Smith) to prepare him for his future destination. It was his mother's proudest wish to see her son a Dissenting Minister. So, if we look back to past generations

(as far as eye can reach), we see the same hopes, fears, wishes, followed by the same disappointments, throbbing in the human heart ; and so we may see them (if we look forward) rising up for ever, and disappearing, like vapourish bubbles, in the human breast ! After being tossed about from congregation to congregation in the heats of the Unitarian controversy, and squabbles about the American war, he had been relegated to an obscure village, where he was to spend the last thirty years of his life, far from the only converse that he loved, the talk about disputed texts of Scripture, and the cause of civil and religious liberty. Here he passed his days, repining, but resigned, in the study of the Bible, and the perusal of the Commentators—huge folios, not easily got through, one of which would outlast a winter ! Why did he pore on these from morn to night (with the exception of a walk in the fields or a turn in the garden to gather broccoli-plants or kidney beans of his own rearing, with no small degree of pride and pleasure) ? Here were “ no figures nor no fantasies ”—neither poetry nor philosophy—nothing to dazzle, nothing to excite modern curiosity ; but to his lack-lustre eyes there appeared within the pages of the ponderous, unwieldy, neglected tomes, the sacred name of JEHOVAH in Hebrew capitals : pressed down by the weight of the style, worn to the last fading thinness of the understanding, there were glimpses, glimmering notions of the patriarchal wanderings, with palm-trees hovering in the horizon, and processions of camels at the distance of three thousand years ; there was Moses with the Burning Bush, the number of the Twelve Tribes, types,

shadows, glosses on the law and the prophets ; there were discussions (dull enough) on the age of Methuselah, a mighty speculation ! there were out-lines, rude guesses at the shape of Noah's Ark and of the riches of Solomon's Temple ; questions as to the date of the creation, predictions of the end of all things ; the great lapses of time, the strange mutations of the globe were unfolded with the voluminous leaf, as it turned over ; and though the soul might slumber with an hieroglyphic veil of inscrutable mysteries drawn over it, yet it was in a slumber ill-exchanged for all the sharpened realities of sense, wit, fancy, or reason. My father's life was comparatively a dream ; but it was a dream of infinity and eternity, of death, the resurrection, and a judgment to come !

No two individuals were ever more unlike than were the host and his guest. A poet was to my father a sort of nondescript ; yet whatever added grace to the Unitarian cause was to him welcome. He could hardly have been more surprised or pleased, if our visitor had worn wings. Indeed, his thoughts had wings : and as the silken sounds rustled round our little wainscoted parlour, my father threw back his spectacles over his forehead, his white hairs mixing with its sanguine hue ; and a smile of delight beamed across his rugged, cordial face to think that Truth had found a new ally in Fancy ! * Besides, Coleridge seemed to take considerable notice of me, and that of itself was enough. He talked very familiarly, but

* My father was one of those who mistook his talent, after all. He used to be very much dissatisfied that I preferred his *Letters* to his *Sermons*. The last were forced and dry ; the first came naturally from him. For ease, half-plays on words, and a supine, monkish, indolent pleasantry, I have never seen them equalled.

agreeably, and glanced over a variety of subjects. At dinner-time he grew more animated, and dilated in a very edifying manner on Mary Wolstonecraft and Mackintosh. The last, he said, he considered (on my father's speaking of his *Vindiciae Gallicæ* as a capital performance) as a clever, scholastic man—a master of the topics—or, as the ready warehouseman of letters, who knew exactly where to lay his hand on what he wanted, though the goods were not his own. He thought him no match for Burke, either in style or matter. Burke was a metaphysician, Mackintosh a mere logician. Burke was an orator (almost a poet) who reasoned in figures, because he had an eye for nature : Mackintosh, on the other hand, was a rhetorician, who had only an eye to common-places. On this I ventured to say that I had always entertained a great opinion of Burke, and that (as far as I could find) the speaking of him with contempt might be made the test of a vulgar, democratical mind. This was the first observation I ever made to Coleridge, and he said it was a very just and striking one. I remember the leg of Welsh mutton and the turnips on the table that day had the finest flavour imaginable. Coleridge added that Mackintosh and Tom Wedgwood (of whom, however, he spoke highly) had expressed a very indifferent opinion of his friend Mr. Wordsworth, on which he remarked to them—" He strides on so far before you, that he dwindles in the distance ! " Godwin had once boasted to him of having carried on an argument with Mackintosh for three hours with dubious success ; Coleridge told him—" If there had been a man of genius in the room he would have settled the question

in five minutes." He asked me if I had ever seen Mary Wolstonecraft, and I said, I had once for a few moments, and that she seemed to me to turn off Godwin's objections to something she advanced with quite a playful, easy air. He replied, that "this was only one instance of the ascendancy which people of imagination exercised over those of mere intellect." He did not rate Godwin very high * (this was caprice or prejudice, real or affected), but he had a great idea of Mrs. Wolstonecraft's powers of conversation; none at all of her talent for book-making. We talked a little about Holcroft. He had been asked if he was not much struck *with* him, and he said, he thought himself in more danger of being struck *by* him. I complained that he would not let me get on at all, for he required a definition of every the commonest word, exclaiming, "What do you mean by a *sensation*, Sir? What do you mean by an *idea*?" This, Coleridge said, was barricadoing the road to truth; it was setting up a turnpike-gate at every step we took. I forgot a great number of things, many more than I remember; but the day passed off pleasantly, and the next morning Mr. Coleridge was to return to Shrewsbury. When I came down to breakfast, I found that he had just received a letter from his friend, T. Wedgwood, making him an offer of 150*l.* a year if he chose to waive his present pursuit, and devote himself entirely to the study of poetry and philosophy. Coleridge seemed to make up his mind to close with this proposal in the act of tying on one of his shoes. It threw an additional damp on his departure. It took the wayward enthusiast quite from us to cast

* He complained—of both.

him into Deva's winding vales, or by the shores of old romance. Instead of living at ten miles' distance, of being the pastor of a Dissenting congregation at Shrewsbury, he was henceforth to inhabit the Hill of Parnassus, to be a Shepherd on the Delectable Mountains. Alas ! I knew not the way thither, and felt very little gratitude for Mr. Wedgwood's bounty. I was presently relieved from this dilemma ; for Mr. Coleridge, asking for a pen and ink, and going to a table to write something on a bit of card, advanced towards me with undulating step, and giving me the precious document, said that that was his address, *Mr. Coleridge, Nether-Stowey, Somersetshire* ; and that he should be glad to see me there in a few weeks' time, and, if I chose, would come half-way to meet me. I was not less surprised than the shepherd-boy (this simile is to be found in *Cassandra*), when he sees a thunderbolt fall close at his feet. I stammered out my acknowledgments and acceptance of this offer (I thought Mr. Wedgwood's annuity a trifle to it) as well as I could ; and this mighty business being settled, the poet preacher took leave, and I accompanied him six miles on the road. It was a fine morning in the middle of winter, and he talked the whole way. The scholar in Chaucer is described as going

—“ Sounding on his way.”

So Coleridge went on his. In digressing, in dilating, in passing from subject to subject, he appeared to me to float in air, to slide on ice. He told me in confidence (going along) that he should have preached two sermons

before he accepted the situation at Shrewsbury, one on Infant Baptism, the other on the Lord's Supper, showing that he could not administer either, which would have effectually disqualified him for the object in view. I observed that he continually crossed me on the way by shifting from one side of the footpath to the other. This struck me as an odd movement; but I did not at that time connect it with any instability of purpose or involuntary change of principle, as I have done since. He seemed unable to keep on in a straight line. He spoke slightly of Hume (whose *Essay on Miracles* he said was stolen from an objection started in one of South's sermons—*Credat Judæus Appella!*) I was not very much pleased at this account of Hume, for I had just been reading, with infinite relish, that completest of all metaphysical *chokepears*, his *Treatise on Human Nature*, to which the *Essays* in point of scholastic subtlety and close reasoning, are mere elegant trifling, light summer reading. Coleridge even denied the excellence of Hume's general style, which I think betrayed a want of taste or candour. He however made me amends by the manner in which he spoke of Berkeley. He dwelt particularly on his *Essay on Vision* as a masterpiece of analytical reasoning. So it undoubtedly is. He was exceedingly angry with Dr. Johnson for striking the stone with his foot, in allusion to this author's *Theory of Matter and Spirit*, and saying, "Thus I confute him, Sir." Coleridge drew a parallel (I don't know how he brought about the connection) between Bishop Berkeley and Tom Paine. He said the one was an instance of a subtle, the other of an acute mind, than which no two

things could be more distinct. The one was a shop-boy's quality, the other the characteristic of a philosopher. He considered Bishop Butler as a true philosopher, a profound and conscientious thinker, a genuine reader of nature and his own mind. He did not speak of his *Analogy*, but of his *Sermons at the Rolls' Chapel*, of which I had never heard. Coleridge somehow always contrived to prefer the *unknown* to the *known*. In this instance he was right. The *Analogy* is a tissue of sophistry, of wire-drawn, theological special-pleading ; the *Sermons* (with the preface to them) are in a fine vein of deep, matured reflection, a candid appeal to our observation of human nature, without pedantry and without bias. I told Coleridge I had written a few remarks, and was sometimes foolish enough to believe that I had made a discovery on the same subject (the *Natural disinterestedness of the Human Mind*)—and I tried to explain my view of it to Coleridge, who listened with great willingness, but I did not succeed in making myself understood. I sat down to the task shortly afterwards for the twentieth time, got new pens and paper, determined to make clear work of it, wrote a few meagre sentences in the skeleton style of a mathematical demonstration, stopped half-way down the second page ; and, after trying in vain to pump up any words, images, notions, apprehensions, facts, or observations, from that gulf of abstraction in which I had plunged myself for four or five years preceding, gave up the attempt as labour in vain, and shed tears of helpless despondency on the blank, unfinished paper. I can write fast enough now. Am I better than I was then ? Oh no ! One truth discovered, one pang

of regret at not being able to express it, is better than all the fluency and flippancy in the world. Would that I could go back to what I then was ! Why can we not revive past times as we can revisit old places ? If I had the quaint Muse of Sir Philip Sidney to assist me, I would write a *Sonnet to the Road between Wem and Shrewsbury*, and immortalise every step of it by some fond enigmatical conceit. I would swear that the very milestones had ears, and that Harmer hill stooped with all its pines, to listen to a poet, as he passed ! I remember but one other topic of discourse in this walk. He mentioned Paley, praised the naturalness and clearness of his style, but condemned his sentiments, thought him a mere time-serving casuist, and said that " the fact of his work on Moral and Political Philosophy being made a text-book in our Universities was a disgrace to the national character." We parted at the six-mile stone ; and I returned homeward, pensive, but much pleased. I had met with unexpected notice from a person whom I believed to have been prejudiced against me. " Kind and affable to me had been his condescension, and should be honoured ever with suitable regard." He was the first poet I had known, and he certainly answered to that inspired name. I had heard a great deal of his powers of conversation and was not disappointed. In fact, I never met with anything at all like them, either before or since. I could easily credit the accounts which were circulated of his holding forth to a large party of ladies and gentlemen, an evening or two before, on the Berkeleian Theory, when he made the whole material universe look like a transparency of fine words ; and

another story (which I believe he has somewhere told himself) of his being asked to a party at Birmingham, of his smoking tobacco and going to sleep after dinner on a sofa, where the company found him, to their no small surprise, which was increased to wonder when he started up of a sudden, and rubbing his eyes, looked about him, and launched into a three hours' description of the third heaven, of which he had had a dream, very different from Mr. Southey's *Vision of Judgment*, and also from that other *Vision of Judgment* which Mr. Murray, the Secretary of the Bridge-street Junta, took into his especial keeping.

On my way back I had a sound in my ears—it was the voice of Fancy; I had a light before me—it was the face of Poetry. The one still lingers there, the other has not quitted my side! Coleridge, in truth, met me half-way on the ground of philosophy, or I should not have been won over to his imaginative creed. I had an uneasy, pleasurable sensation all the time, till I was to visit him. During those months the chill breath of winter gave me a welcoming; the vernal air was balm and inspiration to me. The golden sunsets, the silver star of evening, lighted me on my way to new hopes and prospects. *I was to visit Coleridge in the spring.* This circumstance was never absent from my thoughts, and mingled with all my feelings. I wrote to him at the time proposed, and received an answer postponing my intended visit for a week or two, but very cordially urging me to complete my promise then. This delay did not damp, but rather increased my ardour. In the meantime, I went to Llangollen Vale, by way of initiating myself in

the mysteries of natural scenery ; and I must say I was enchanted with it. I had been reading Coleridge's description of England in his fine *Ode on the Departing Year*, and I applied it, *con amore*, to the objects before me. That valley was to me (in a manner) the cradle of a new existence : in the river that winds through it, my spirit was baptised in the waters of Helicon !

I returned home, and soon after set out on my journey with unworn heart, and untired feet. My way lay through Worcester and Gloucester, and by Upton, where I thought of Tom Jones and the adventure of the muff. I remember getting completely wet through one day, and stopping at an inn (I think it was at Tewkesbury), where I sat up all night to read *Paul and Virginia*. Sweet were the showers in early youth that drenched my body, and sweet the drops of pity that fell upon the books I read ! I recollect a remark of Coleridge's upon this very book that nothing could show the gross indelicacy of French manners and the entire corruption of their imagination more strongly than the behaviour of the heroine in the last fatal scene, who turns away from a person on board the sinking vessel, that offers to save her life, because he has thrown off his clothes to assist him in swimming. Was this a time to think of such a circumstance ? I once hinted to Wordsworth, as we were sailing in his boat on Grasmere lake, that I thought he had borrowed the idea of his *Poems on the Naming of Places* from the local inscriptions of the same kind in *Paul and Virginia*. He did not own the obligation, and stated some distinction without a difference in defence of his claim to originality. Any, the slightest

variation, would be sufficient for this purpose in his mind ; for whatever *he* added or altered would inevitably be worth all that any one else had done, and contain the marrow of the sentiment. I was still two days before the time fixed for my arrival, for I had taken care to set out early enough. I stopped these two days at Bridgewater ; and when I was tired of sauntering on the banks of its muddy river, returned to the inn and read *Camilla*. So have I loitered my life away, reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best. I have wanted only one thing to make me happy ; but wanting that have wanted everything !

I arrived, and was well received. The country about Nether Stowey is beautiful, green and hilly, and near the sea-shore. I saw it but the other day, after an interval of twenty years, from a hill near Taunton. How was the map of my life spread out before me, as the map of the country lay at my feet ! In the afternoon, Coleridge took me over to All-Foxden, a romantic old family mansion of the St. Aubins, where Wordsworth lived. It was then in the possession of a friend of the poet's, who gave him the free use of it. Somehow, that period (the time just after the French Revolution) was not a time when *nothing was given for nothing*. The mind opened and a softness might be perceived coming over the heart of individuals, beneath " the scales that fence " our self-interest. Wordsworth himself was from home, but his sister kept house, and set before us a frugal repast ; and we had free access to her brother's poems, the *Lyrical Ballads*, which were still in manuscript, or in the

form of *Sybilline Leaves*. I dipped into a few of these with great satisfaction, and with the faith of a novice. I slept that night in an old room with blue hangings, and covered with the round-faced family portraits of the age of George I. and II., and from the wooded declivity of the adjoining park that overlooked my window, at the dawn of day, could

—“ hear the loud stag speak.”

In the outset of life (and particularly at this time I felt it so) our imagination has a body to it. We are in a state between sleeping and waking, and have indistinct but glorious glimpses of strange shapes, and there is always something to come better than what we see. As in our dreams the fulness of the blood gives warmth and reality to the coinage of the brain, so in youth our ideas are clothed, and fed, and pampered with our good spirits ; we breathe thick with thoughtless happiness, the weight of future years presses on the strong pulses of the heart, and we repose with undisturbed faith in truth and good. As we advance, we exhaust our fund of enjoyment and of hope. We are no longer wrapped in *lamb's-wool*, lulled in Elysium. As we taste the pleasures of life, their spirit evaporates, the sense palls ; and nothing is left but the phantoms, the lifeless shadows of what *has been* !

That morning, as soon as breakfast was over, we strolled out into the park, and seating ourselves on the trunk of an old ash-tree that stretched along the ground, Coleridge read aloud with a sonorous and musical voice,

the ballad of *Betty Foy*. I was not critically or sceptically inclined. I saw touches of truth and nature, and took the rest for granted. But in the *Thorn*, the *Mad Mother*, and the *Complaint of a Poor Indian Woman*, I felt that deeper power and pathos which have been since acknowledged,

“ In spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite,”

as the characteristics of this author ; and the sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me. It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of the fresh soil, or of the first welcome breath of Spring :

“ While yet the trembling year is unconfirmed.”

Coleridge and myself walked back to Stowey that evening, and his voice sounded high

“ Of Providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
Fix’d fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,”

as we passed through echoing grove, by fairy stream or waterfall, gleaming in the summer moonlight ! He lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to believe in the traditional superstitions of the place, and that there was a something corporeal, a *matter-of-factness*, a clinging to the palpable, or often to the petty, in his poetry, in consequence. His genius was not a spirit that descended to him through the air ; it sprung out of the ground like a flower, or unfolded itself from a green

spray, on which the goldfinch sang. He said, however (if I remember right), that this objection must be confined to his descriptive pieces, that his philosophic poetry had a grand and comprehensive spirit in it, so that his soul seemed to inhabit the universe like a palace, and to discover truth by intuition, rather than by deduction. The next day Wordsworth arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge in his gait, not unlike his own *Peter Bell*. There was a severe worn, pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. Chantrey's bust wants the marking traits; but he was teased into making it regular and heavy: Haydon's head of him, introduced into the *Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem*, is the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear, gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine. He instantly began to make havoc of the half of a Cheshire cheese on the table, and said, triumphantly, that "his marriage with experience

had not been so productive as Mr. Southey's in teaching him a knowledge of the good things of this life." He had been to see the *Castle Spectre* by Monk Lewis, while at Bristol, and described it very well. He said "it fitted the taste of the audience like a glove." This *ad captandum* merit was however by no means a recommendation of it, according to the severe principles of the new school, which reject rather than court, popular effect. Wordsworth, looking out of the low, latticed window, said, "How beautifully the sun sets on that yellow bank!" I thought within myself, "With what eyes these poets see nature!" and ever after, when I saw the sun-set stream upon the objects facing it, conceived I had made a discovery, or thanked Mr. Wordsworth for having made one for me! We went over to All-Foxden again the day following, and Wordsworth read us the story of *Peter Bell* in the open air; and the comment upon it by his face and voice was very different from that of some later critics! Whatever might be thought of the poem, "his face was as a book where men might read strange matters," and he announced the fate of his hero in prophetic tones. There is a *chaunt* in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth, which acts as a spell upon the hearer, and disarms the judgment. Perhaps they have deceived themselves by making habitual use of this ambiguous accompaniment. Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. The one might be termed more *dramatic*, the other more *lyrical*. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the

straggling branches of a copse-wood; whereas Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption. Returning that same evening, I got into a metaphysical argument with Wordsworth, while Coleridge was explaining the different notes of the nightingale to his sister, in which we neither of us succeeded in making ourselves perfectly clear and intelligible. Thus I passed three weeks at Nether Stowey and in the neighbourhood, generally devoting the afternoons to a delightful chat in an arbour made of bark by the poet's friend Tom Poole, sitting under two fine elm-trees, and listening to the bees humming round us, while we quaffed our *flip*. It was agreed, among other things, that we should make a jaunt down the Bristol Channel, as far as Linton. We set off together on foot, Coleridge, John Chester, and I. This Chester was a native of Nether Stowey, one of those who were attracted to Coleridge's discourse as flies are to honey, or bees in swarming-time to the sound of a brass pan. He "followed in the chase like a dog who hunts, not like one that made up the cry." He had on a brown cloth coat, boots, and corduroy breeches, was low in stature, bow-legged, had a drag in his walk like a drover, which he assisted by a hazel switch, and kept on a sort of trot by the side of Coleridge, like a running footman by a state coach, that he might not lose a syllable or sound that fell from Coleridge's lips. He told me his private opinion, that Coleridge was a wonderful man. He scarcely opened his lips, much less offered an opinion the whole way: yet of the three, had I to choose

during that journey, I would be John Chester. He afterwards followed Coleridge into Germany, where the Kantean philosophers were puzzled how to bring him under any of their categories. When he sat down at table with his idol, John's felicity was complete ; Sir Walter Scott's, or Mr. Blackwood's, when they sat down at the same table with the King, was not more so. We passed Dunster on our right, a small town between the brow of a hill and the sea. I remember eyeing it wistfully as it lay below us : contrasted with the woody scene around, it looked as clear, as pure, as *embrowned* and ideal as any landscape I have seen since, of Gaspar Poussin's or Domenichino's. We had a long day's march (our feet kept time to the echoes of Coleridge's tongue) through Minehead and by the Blue Anchor, and on to Linton, which we did not reach till near midnight, and where we had some difficulty in making a lodgment. We, however, knocked the people of the house up at last, and we were repaid for our apprehensions and fatigue by some excellent rashers of fried bacon and eggs. The view in coming along had been splendid. We walked for miles and miles on dark brown heaths overlooking the Channel, with the Welsh hills beyond, and at times descended into little sheltered valleys close by the sea-side, with a smuggler's face scowling by us, and then had to ascend conical hills with a path winding up through a coppice to a barren top, like a monk's shaven crown, from one of which I pointed out to Coleridge's notice the bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon, and within the red-orbed disk of the setting sun, like his own spectre-ship in the *Ancient Mariner*. At Linton

the character of the sea-coast becomes more marked and rugged. There is a place called the *Valley of Rocks* (I suspect this was only the poetical name for it), bedded among precipices overhanging the sea, with rocky caverns beneath, into which the waves dash, and where the sea-gull for ever wheels its screaming flight. On the tops of these are huge stones thrown transverse, as if an earthquake had tossed them there, and behind these is a fretwork of perpendicular rocks, something like the *Giant's Causeway*. A thunder-storm came on while we were at the inn, and Coleridge was running out bare-headed to enjoy the commotion of the elements in the *Valley of Rocks*, but as if in spite, the clouds only muttered a few angry sounds, and let fall a few refreshing drops. Coleridge told me that he and Wordsworth were to have made this place the scene of a prose-tale, which was to have been in the manner of, but far superior to, the *Death of Abel*, but they had relinquished the design. In the morning of the second day, we breakfasted luxuriously in an old-fashioned parlour on tea, toast, eggs, and honey, in the very sight of the bee-hives from which it had been taken, and a garden full of thyme and wild flowers that had produced it. On this occasion Coleridge spoke of Virgil's *Georgics*, but not well. I do not think he had much feeling for the classical or elegant.*

* He had no idea of pictures, of Claude or Raphael, and at this time I had as little as he. He sometimes gives a striking account at present of the Cartoons at Pisa by Buffamalco and others ; of one in particular where Death is seen in the air brandishing his scythe, and the great and mighty of the earth shudder at his approach, while the beggars and the wretched kneel to him as their deliverer. He would, of course, understand so broad and fine a moral as this at any time.

It was in this room that we found a little worn-out copy of the *Seasons*, lying in a window-seat, on which Coleridge exclaimed, " *That* is true fame!" He said Thomson was a great poet, rather than a good one; his style was as meretricious as his thoughts were natural. He spoke of Cowper as the best modern poet. He said the *Lyrical Ballads* were an experiment about to be tried by him and Wordsworth, to see how far the public taste would endure poetry written in a more natural and simple style than had hitherto been attempted; totally discarding the artifices of poetical diction, and making use only of such words as had probably been common in the most ordinary language since the days of Henry II. Some comparison was introduced between Shakspear and Milton. He said " he hardly knew which to prefer. Shakspear appeared to him a mere stripling in the art; he was as tall and as strong, with infinitely more activity than Milton, but he never appeared to have come to man's estate; or if he had, he would not have been a man, but a monster." He spoke with contempt of Gray, and with intolerance of Pope. He did not like the versification of the latter. He observed that " the ears of these couplet-writers might be charged with having short memories, that could not retain the harmony of whole passages." He thought little of Junius as a writer; he had a dislike of Dr. Johnson; and a much higher opinion of Burke as an orator and politician, than of Fox or Pitt. He, however, thought him very inferior in richness of style and imagery to some of our elder prose-writers, particularly Jeremy Taylor. He liked Richardson, but not Fielding; nor could I get him to

enter into the merits of *Caleb Williams*. In short, he was profound and discriminating with respect to those authors whom he liked, and where he gave his judgment fair play; capricious, perverse, and prejudiced in his antipathies and distastes. We loitered on the "ribbed sea-sands," in such talk as this a whole morning, and, I recollect, met with a curious seaweed, of which John Chester told us the country name! A fisherman gave Coleridge an account of a boy that had been drowned the day before, and that they had tried to save him at the risk of their own lives. He said "he did not know how it was that they ventured, but, Sir, we have a *nature* towards one another." This expression, Coleridge remarked to me, was a fine illustration of that theory of disinterestedness which I (in common with Butler) had adopted. I broached to him an argument of mine to prove that *likeness* was not mere association of ideas. I said that the mark in the sand put one in mind of a man's foot, not because it was part of a former impression of a man's foot (for it was quite new), but because it was like the shape of a man's foot. He assented to the justness of this distinction (which I have explained at length elsewhere, for the benefit of the curious) and John Chester listened; not from any interest in the subject, but because he was astonished that I should be able to suggest anything to Coleridge that he did not already know. We returned on the third morning, and Coleridge remarked the silent cottage-smoke curling up the valleys where, a few evenings before, we had seen the lights gleaming through the dark.

In a day or two after we arrived at Stowey, we set out, I on my return home, and he for Germany. It was a Sunday morning, and he was to preach that day for Dr. Toulmin of Taunton. I asked him if he had prepared anything for the occasion? He said he had not even thought of the text, but should as soon as we parted. I did not go to hear him—this was a fault—but we met in the evening at Bridgewater. The next day we had a long day's walk to Bristol, and sat down, I recollect, by a well-side on the road, to cool ourselves and satisfy our thirst, when Coleridge repeated to me some descriptive lines of his tragedy of *Remorse*; which I must say became his mouth and that occasion better than they, some years after, did Mr. Elliston's and the Drury-lane boards—

“ Oh memory! shield me from the world's poor strife,
And give those scenes thine everlasting life.”

I saw no more of him for a year or two, during which period he had been wandering in the Hartz Forest, in Germany; and his return was cometary, meteorous, unlike his setting out. It was not till some time after that I knew his friends Lamb and Southey. The last always appears to me (as I first saw him) with a commonplace book under his arm, and the first with a *bon-mot* in his mouth. It was at Godwin's that I met him with Holcroft and Coleridge, where they were disputing fiercely which was the best—*Man as he was, or man as he is to be*. “ Give me,” says Lamb, “ man as he is not to be.” This saying was the beginning of a friendship

between us, which I believe still continues. Enough of this for the present.

“ But there is matter for another rhyme,
And I to this may add a second tale.”

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OF PERSONS ONE WOULD WISH TO HAVE SEEN

“Come like shadows—so depart.”

LAMB it was, I think, who suggested this subject, as well as the defence of Guy Faux, which I urged him to execute. As, however, he would undertake neither, I suppose I must do both, a task for which he would have been much fitter, no less from the temerity than the felicity of his pen—

“Never so sure our rapture to create
As when it touch'd the brink of all we hate.”

Compared with him, I shall, I fear, make but a commonplace piece of business of it ; but I should be loth the idea was entirely lost, and besides I may avail myself of some hints of his in the progress of it. I am sometimes, I suspect, a better reporter of the ideas of other people than expounder of my own. I pursue the one too far into paradox or mysticism ; the others I am not bound to follow farther than I like, or than seems fair and reasonable.

On the question being started, Ayrton said, “I suppose

the two first persons you would choose to see would be the two greatest names in English literature, Sir Isaac Newton and Mr. Locke?" In this Ayrton, as usual, reckoned without his host. Every one burst out a-laughing at the expression of Lamb's face, in which impatience was restrained by courtesy. "Yes, the greatest names," he stammered out hastily, "but they were not persons—not persons?"—"Not persons?" said Ayrton, looking wise and foolish at the same time, afraid his triumph might be premature. "That is," rejoined Lamb, "not characters, you know. By Mr. Locke and Sir Isaac Newton, you mean the *Essay on the Human Understanding*, and the *Principia*, which we have to this day. Beyond their contents there is nothing personally interesting in the men. But what we want to see any one *bodily* for, is when there is something peculiar, striking in the individuals, more than we can learn from their writings, and yet are curious to know. I dare say Locke and Newton were very like Kneller's portraits of them. But who could paint Shakespear?"—"Ay," retorted Ayrton, "there it is; then I suppose you would prefer seeing him and Milton instead?"—"No," said Lamb, "neither. I have seen so much of Shakspeare on the stage and on bookstalls, in frontispieces and on mantel-pieces, that I am quite tired of the everlasting repetition: and as to Milton's face, the impressions that have come down to us of it I do not like; it is too starched and puritanical; and I should be afraid of losing some of the manna of his poetry in the leaven of his countenance and the precisian's band and gown."—"I shall guess no more," said Ayrton. "Who is it,

then, you would like to see 'in his habit as he lived,' if you had your choice of the whole range of English literature ? " Lamb then named Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, as the two worthies whom he should feel the greatest pleasure to encounter on the floor of his apartment in their night-gown and slippers, and to exchange friendly greeting with them. At this Ayrton laughed outright, and conceived Lamb was jesting with him ; but as no one followed his example, he thought there might be something in it, and waited for an explanation in a state of whimsical suspense. Lamb then (as well as I can remember a conversation that passed twenty years ago—how time slips !) went on as follows. " The reason why I pitch upon these two authors is, that their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages. They resemble the soothsayers of old, who dealt in dark hints and doubtful oracles ; and I should like to ask them the meaning of what no mortal but themselves, I should suppose, can fathom. There is Dr. Johnson : I have no curiosity, no strange uncertainty about him ; he and Boswell together have pretty well let me into the secret of what passed through his mind. He and other writers like him are sufficiently explicit : my friends whose repose I should be tempted to disturb (were it in my power), are implicit, inextricable, inscrutable.

" When I look at that obscure but gorgeous prose composition the *Urn-burial*, I seem to myself to look into a deep abyss, at the bottom of which are hid pearls and rich treasure ; or it is like a stately labyrinth of

doubt and withering speculation, and I would invoke the spirit of the author to lead me through it. Besides, who would not be curious to see the lineaments of a man who, having himself been twice married, wished that mankind were propagated like trees ! As to Fulke Greville, he is like nothing but one of his own ' Prologues spoken by the ghost of an old king of Ormus,' a truly formidable and inviting personage : his style is apocalyptic, cabalistical, a knot worthy of such an apparition to untie ; and for the unravelling a passage or two, I would stand the brunt of an encounter with so portentous a commentator ! "—" I am afraid, in that case," said Ayrton, " that if the mystery were once cleared up, the merit might be lost " ; and turning to me, whispered a friendly apprehension, that while Lamb continued to admire these old crabbed authors, he would never become a popular writer. Dr. Donne was mentioned as a writer of the same period, with a very interesting countenance, whose history was singular, and whose meaning was often quite as *uncometeable*, without a personal citation from the dead, as that of any of his contemporaries. The volume was produced ; and while some one was expatiating on the exquisite simplicity and beauty of the portrait prefixed to the old edition, Ayrton got hold of the poetry, and exclaiming " What have we here ? " read the following :

" Here lies a She-Sun and a He-Moon there—
She gives the best light to his sphear,
Or each is both, and all, and so
They unto one another nothing owe."

There was no resisting this, till Lamb, seizing the volume, turned to the beautiful *Lines to his Mistress*, dissuading her from accompanying him abroad, and read them with suffused features and a faltering tongue :

“ By our first strange and fatal interview,
By all desires which thereof did ensue,
By our long starving hopes, by that remorse
Which my words’ masculine perswasive force
Begot in thee, and by the memory
Of hurts, which spies and rivals threatened me,
I calmly beg. But by thy father’s wrath,
By all paines which want and divorcement hath,
I conjure thee ; and all the oathes which I
And thou have sworne to seale joyn特 constancy
Here I unsweare, and overswear them thus—
Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous.
Temper, O fair love ! love’s impetuous rage,
Be my true mistris still, not my faign’d Page ;
I’ll goe, and, by thy kinde leave, leave behinde
Thee ! onely worthy to nurse in my minde.
Thirst to come backe ; O, if thou die before,
My soule, from other lands to thee shall soare.
Thy (else almighty) beauty cannot move
Rage from the seas, nor thy love teach them love.
Nor tame wild Boreas’ harshnesse ; thou hast reade
How roughly hee in pieces shivered
Fair Orithea, whom he swore he lov’d.
Fall ill or good, ’tis madnesse to have prov’d
Dangers unurg’d : Feed on this flattery,
That absent lovers one in th’ other be.

Dissemble nothing, not a boy ; nor change
Thy bodie's habite, nor minde ; be not strange
To thyselfe onely. All will spie in thy face
A blushing, womanly, discovering grace,
Richly-cloath'd apes are call'd apes, and as soone
Eclips'd as bright, we call the moone the moon.
Men of France, changeable camelions,
Spittles of diseases, shops of fashions,
Love's fuellers, and the rightest company
Of players, which upon the world's stage be,
Will quickly know thee . . .
O stay here ! for for thee
England is onely a worthy gallerie,
To walke in expectation ; till from thence
Our greatest King call thee to his presence.
When I am gone, dreame me some happinesse,
Nor let thy lookes our long-hid love confesse,
Nor praise, nor dispraise me ; nor blesse, nor curse
Openly love's force, nor in bed fright thy nurse
With midnight's startings, crying out, Oh, oh,
Nurse, oh, my love is slaine, I saw him goe
O'er the white Alpes alone ; I saw him, I,
Assail'd, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die.
Augure me better chance, except dread Jove
Thinke it enough for me to have had thy love."

Some one then inquired of Lamb if we could not see from the window the Temple walk in which Chaucer used to take his exercise ; and on his name being put to the vote, I was pleased to find that there was a general sensation in his favour in all but Ayrton, who said some-

thing about the ruggedness of the metre, and even objected to the quaintness of the orthography. I was vexed at this superficial gloss, pertinaciously reducing everything to its own trite level, and asked “ if he did not think it would be worth while to scan the eye that had first greeted the Muse in that dim twilight and early dawn of English literature ; to see the head round which the visions of fancy must have played like gleams of inspiration or a sudden glory ; to watch those lips that ‘ lisped in numbers, for the numbers came ’—as by a miracle, or as if the dumb should speak ? Nor was it alone that he had been the first to tune his native tongue (however imperfectly to modern ears) ; but he was himself a noble, manly character, standing before his age and striving to advance it ; a pleasant humourist withal, who has not only handed down to us the living manners of his time, but had, no doubt, store of curious and quaint devices, and would make as hearty a companion as mine Host of the Tabard. His interview with Petrarch is fraught with interest. Yet I would rather have seen Chaucer in company with the author of the *Decameron*, and have heard them exchange their best stories together—the *Squire’s Tale* against the *Story of the Falcon*, the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* against the *Adventures of Friar Albert*. How fine to see the high mysterious brow which learning then wore, relieved by the gay, familiar tone of men of the world, and by the courtesies of genius ! Surely, the thoughts and feelings which passed through the minds of these great revivers of learning, these Cadmuses who sowed the teeth of letters, must have stamped an expression on their

features as different from the moderns as their books, and well worth the perusal. *Dante*," I continued, " is as interesting a person as his own Ugolino, one whose lineaments curiosity would as eagerly devour in order to penetrate his spirit, and the only one of the Italian poets I should care much to see. There is a fine portrait of Ariosto by no less a hand than Titian's; light, Moorish, spirited, but not answering our idea. The same artist's large colossal profile of Peter Aretine is the only likeness of the kind that has the effect of conversing with 'the mighty dead'; and this is truly spectral, ghastly, necromantic." Lamb put it to me if I should like to see Spenser as well as Chaucer; and I answered, without hesitation, "No; for that his beauties were ideal, visionary, not palpable or personal, and therefore connected with less curiosity about the man. His poetry was the essence of romance, a very halo round the bright orb of fancy; and the bringing in the individual might dissolve the charm. No tones of voice could come up to the mellifluous cadence of his verse; no form but of a winged angel could vie with the airy shapes he has described. He was (to my apprehension) rather a 'creature of the element, that lived in the rainbow and played in the plighted clouds,' than an ordinary mortal. Or if he did appear, I should wish it to be as a mere vision, like one of his own pageants, and that he should pass by unquestioned like a dream or sound—

—‘*That was Arion crown'd:
So went he playing on the wat'ry plain.*’ ”

Captain Burney muttered something about Columbus, and Martin Burney hinted at the Wandering Jew ; but the last was set aside as spurious, and the first made over to the New World.

“ I should like,” said Mrs. Reynolds, “ to have seen Pope talk with Patty Blount ; and I *have* seen Goldsmith.” Every one turned round to look at Mrs. Reynolds, as if by so doing they could get a sight at Goldsmith.

“ Where,” asked a harsh, croaking voice, “ was Dr. Johnson in the years 1745-6 ? He did not write anything that we know of, nor is there any account of him in Boswell during those two years. Was he in Scotland with the Pretender ? He seems to have passed through the scenes in the Highlands in company with Boswell, many years after, ‘ with lack-lustre eye,’ yet as if they were familiar to him, or associated in his mind with interests that he durst not explain. If so, it would be an additional reason for my liking him ; and I would give something to have seen him seated in the tent with the youthful Majesty of Britain, and penning the Proclamation to all true subjects and adherents of the legitimate Government.”

“ I thought,” said Ayrton, turning short round upon Lamb, “ that you of the Lake School did not like Pope ? ”—“ Not like Pope ! My dear sir, you must be under a mistake—I can read him over and over for ever ! ”—“ Why, certainly, the *Essay on Man* must be allowed to be a masterpiece.”—“ It may be so, but I seldom look into it.”—“ Oh ! then it’s his Satires you admire ? ”—“ No, not his Satires, but his friendly

Epistles and his compliments."—"Compliments! I did not know he ever made any."—"The finest," said Lamb, "that were ever paid by the wit of man. Each of them is worth an estate for life—nay, is an immortality. There is that superb one to Lord Cornbury:

'Despise low joys, low gains;
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains.'

Was there ever more artful insinuation of idolatrous praise? And then that noble apotheosis of his friend Lord Mansfield (however little deserved), when, speaking of the House of Lords, he adds:

'Conspicuous scene! another yet is nigh,
(More silent far) where kings and poets lie;
Where Murray (long enough his country's pride)
Shall be no more than Tully or than Hyde.'

And with what a fine turn of indignant flattery he addresses Lord Bolingbroke:

'Why rail they then, if but one wreath of mine,
Oh! all accomplish'd St. John, deck thy shrine?'

Or turn," continued Lamb, with a slight hectic on his cheek and his eye glistening, "to his list of early friends:

'But why then publish? Granville the polite,
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;

Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,
And Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays :
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read,
Ev'n mitred Rochester would nod the head ;
And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
Received with open arms one poet more.
Happy my studies, if by these approved !
Happier their author, if by these beloved !
From these the world will judge of men and books,
Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks.'"

Here his voice totally failed him, and throwing down the book, he said, " Do you think I would not wish to have been friends with such a man as this ? "

" What say you to Dryden ? "—" He rather made a show of himself, and courted popularity in that lowest temple of fame, a coffee-shop, so as in some measure to vulgarise one's idea of him. Pope, on the contrary, reached the very *beau ideal* of what a poet's life should be ; and his fame while living seemed to be an emanation from that which was to circle his name after death. He was so far enviable (and one would feel proud to have witnessed the rare spectacle in him) that he was almost the only poet and man of genius who met with his reward on this side of the tomb, who realised in friends, fortune, the esteem of the world, the most sanguine hopes, of a youthful ambition, and who found that sort of patronage from the great during his lifetime which they would be thought anxious to bestow upon him after his death. Read Gay's verses to him on his supposed return from Greece, after his translation of Homer was

finished, and say if you would not gladly join the bright procession that welcomed him home, or see it once more land at Whitehall stairs."—" Still," said Mrs. Reynolds, " I would rather have seen him talking with Patty Blount, or riding by in a coronet-coach with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu ! "

Erasmus Phillips, who was deep in a game of piquet at the other end of the room, whispered to Martin Burney to ask if Junius would not be a fit person to invoke from the dead. " Yes," said Lamb, " provided he would agree to lay aside his mask."

We were now at a stand for a short time, when Fielding was mentioned as a candidate ; only one, however, seconded the proposition. " Richardson ? "—" By all means, but only to look at him through the glass door of his back shop, hard at work upon one of his novels (the most extraordinary contrast that ever was presented between an author and his works) ; not to let him come behind his counter, lest he should want you to turn customer, or to go upstairs with him, lest he should offer to read the first manuscript of Sir Charles Grandison, which was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes octavo, or get out the letters of his female correspondents, to prove that Joseph Andrews was low."

There was but one statesman in the whole of English history that any one expressed the least desire to see—Oliver Cromwell, with his fine, frank, rough, pimply face, and wily policy ; and one enthusiast, John Bunyan, the immortal author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It seemed that if he came into the room, dreams would follow him,

and that each person would nod under his golden cloud, “nigh-sphered in heaven,” a canopy as strange and stately as any in Homer.

Of all persons near our own time, Garrick’s name was received with the greatest enthusiasm, who was proposed by Barron Field. He presently superseded both Hogarth and Handel, who had been talked of, but then it was on condition that he should act in tragedy and comedy, in the play and the farce, *Lear* and *Wildair* and *Abel Drugger*. What a *sight for sore eyes* that would be ! Who would not part with a year’s income at least, almost with a year of his natural life, to be present at it ? Besides, as he could not act alone, and recitations are unsatisfactory things, what a troop he must bring with him—the silver-tongued Barry, and Quin, and Shuter and Weston, and Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Pritchard, of whom I have heard my father speak as so great a favourite when he was young. This would indeed be a revival of the dead, the restoring of art ; and so much the more desirable, as such is the lurking scepticism mingled with our overstrained admiration of past excellence, that though we have the speeches of Burke, the portraits of Reynolds, the writings of Goldsmith, and the conversation of Johnson, to show what people could do at that period, and to confirm the universal testimony to the merits of Garrick ; yet, as it was before our time, we have our misgivings, as if he was probably, after all, little better than a Bartlemy-fair actor, dressed out to play *Macbeth* in a scarlet coat and laced cocked-hat. For one, I should like to have seen and heard with my own eyes and ears. Certainly, by all accounts, if any one was

ever moved by the true histrionic *aestus*, it was Garrick. When he followed the Ghost in *Hamlet*, he did not drop the sword, as most actors do, behind the scenes, but kept the point raised the whole way round, so fully was he possessed with the idea, or so anxious not to lose sight of his part for a moment. Once at a splendid dinner-party at Lord —'s, they suddenly missed Garrick, and could not imagine what was become of him, till they were drawn to the window by the convulsive screams and peals of laughter of a young negro boy, who was rolling on the ground in an ecstasy of delight to see Garrick mimicking a turkey-cock in the court-yard, with his coat-tail stuck out behind, and in a seeming flutter of feathered rage and pride. Of our party only two persons present had seen the British Roscius ; and they seemed as willing as the rest to renew their acquaintance with their old favourite.

We were interrupted in the hey-day and mid-career of this fanciful speculation, by a grumbler in a corner, who declared it was a shame to make all this rout about a mere player and farce-writer, to the neglect and exclusion of the fine old dramatists, the contemporaries and rivals of Shakspeare. Lamb said he had anticipated this objection when he had named the author of *Mustapha* and *Alaham* ; and, out of caprice, insisted upon keeping him to represent the set, in preference to the wild, hare-brained enthusiast, Kit Marlowe ; to the sexton of St. Ann's, Webster, with his melancholy yew-trees and death's-heads ; to Decker, who was but a garrulous proser ; to the voluminous Heywood ; and even to Beaumont and Fletcher, whom we might offend

by complimenting the wrong author on their joint productions. Lord Brooke, on the contrary, stood quite by himself, or, in Cowley's words, was "a vast species alone." Some one hinted at the circumstance of his being a lord, which rather startled Lamb, but he said a *ghost* would perhaps dispense with strict etiquette, on being regularly addressed by his title. Ben Jonson divided our suffrages pretty equally. Some were afraid he would begin to traduce Shakespear, who was not present to defend himself. "If he grows disagreeable," it was whispered aloud, "there is Godwin can match him." At length, his romantic visit to Drummond of Hawthornden was mentioned, and turned the scale in his favour.

Lamb inquired if there was any one that was hanged that I would choose to mention? And I answered, Eugene Aram. The name of the "Admirable Crichton" was suddenly started as a splendid example of *waste* talents, so different from the generality of his countrymen. This choice was mightily approved by a North-Briton present, who declared himself descended from that prodigy of learning and accomplishment, and said he had family plate in his possession as vouchers for the fact, with the initials A. C.—*Admirable Crichton!* Hunt laughed, or rather roared, as heartily at this as I should think he has done for many years.

The last named Mitre-courtier * then wished to know whether there were any metaphysicians to whom one might be tempted to apply the wizard spell? I replied, there were only six in modern times deserving the name

* Lamb at this time occupied chambers in Mitre-court, Temple.

—Hobbes, Berkeley, Butler, Hartley, Hume, Leibnitz ; and perhaps Jonathan Edwards, a Massachusetts man.* As to the French, who talked fluently of having *created* this science, there was not a tittle in any of their writings that was not to be found literally in the authors I had mentioned. [Horne Tooke, who might have a claim to come in under the head of Grammar, was still living.] None of these names seemed to excite much interest, and I did not plead for the re-appearance of those who might be thought best fitted by the abstracted nature of their studies for the present spiritual and disembodied state, and who, even while on this living stage, were nearly divested of common flesh and blood. As Ayrton, with an uneasy, fidgety face, was about to put some question about Mr. Locke and Dugald Stewart, he was prevented by Martin Burney, who observed, “ If J—— was here, he would undoubtedly be for having up those profound and redoubted socialists, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.” I said this might be fair enough in him who had read, or fancied he had read, the original works, but I did not see how we could have any right to call up these authors to give an account of themselves in person, till we had looked into their writings.

* Bacon is not included in this list, nor do I know where he should come in. It is not easy to make room for him and his reputation together. This great and celebrated man in some of his works recommends it to pour a bottle of claret into the ground of a morning, and to stand over it, inhaling the perfumes. So he sometimes enriched the dry and barren soil of speculation with the fine aromatic spirit of his genius. His *Essays* and his *Advancement of Learning* are works of vast depth and scope of observation. The last, though it contains no positive discoveries, is a noble chart of the human intellect, and a guide to all future inquirers.

By this time it should seem that some rumour of our whimsical deliberation had got wind, and had disturbed the *irritable genus* in their shadowy abodes, for we received messages from several candidates that we had just been thinking of. Gray declined our invitation, though he had not yet been asked : Gay offered to come, and bring in his hand the Duchess of Bolton, the original Polly : Steele and Addison left their cards as Captain Sentry and Sir Roger de Coverley : Swift came in and sat down without speaking a word, and quitted the room as abruptly : Otway and Chatterton were seen lingering on the opposite side of the Styx, but could not muster enough between them to pay Charon his fare : Thomson fell asleep in the boat, and was rowed back again ; and Burns sent a low fellow, one John Barleycorn, an old companion of his, who had conducted him to the other world, to say that he had during his lifetime been drawn out of his retirement as a show, only to be made an exciseman of, and that he would rather remain where he was. He desired, however, to shake hands by his representative — the hand, thus held out, was in a burning fever, and shook prodigiously.

The room was hung round with several portraits of eminent painters. While we were debating whether we should demand speech with these masters of mute eloquence, whose features were so familiar to us, it seemed that all at once they glided from their frames, and seated themselves at some little distance from us. There was Leonardo, with his majestic beard and watchful eye, having a bust of Archimedes before him ; next

him was Raphael's graceful head turned round to the Fornarina; and on his other side was Lucretia Borgia, with calm, golden locks; Michael Angelo had placed the model of St. Peter's on the table before him; Correggio had an angel at his side; Titian was seated with his mistress between himself and Giorgione; Guido was accompanied by his own Aurora, who took a dice-box from him; Claude held a mirror in his hand; Rubens patted a beautiful panther (led in by a satyr) on the head; Vandyke appeared as his own Paris, and Rembrandt was hid under furs, gold chains, and jewels, which Sir Joshua eyed closely, holding his hand so as to shade his forehead. Not a word was spoken; and as we rose to do them homage, they still presented the same surface to the view. Not being *bonâ-fide* representations of living people, we got rid of the splendid apparitions by signs and dumb show. As soon as they had melted into thin air, there was a loud noise at the outer door, and we found it was Giotto, Cimabue, and Ghirlandaio, who had been raised from the dead by their earnest desire to see their illustrious successors—

“ Whose names on earth
In Fame's eternal records live for aye ! ”

Finding them gone, they had no ambition to be seen after them, and mournfully withdrew. “ Egad ! ” said Lamb, “ these are the very fellows I should like to have had some talk with, to know how they could see to paint when all was dark around them.”

“ But shall we have nothing to say,” interrogated

G. J.—“to the *Legend of Good Women*?”—“Name, name, Mr. J—,” cried Hunt in a boisterous tone of friendly exultation, “name as many as you please, without reserve or fear of molestation!” J— was perplexed between so many amiable recollections, that the name of the lady of his choice expired in a pensive whiff of his pipe; and Lamb impatiently declared for the Duchess of Newcastle. Mrs. Hutchinson was no sooner mentioned, than she carried the day from the Duchess. We were the less solicitous on this subject of filling up the posthumous lists of Good Women, as there was already one in the room as good, as sensible, and in all respects as exemplary, as the best of them could be for their lives! “I should like vastly to have seen Ninon de l’Enclos,” said that incomparable person; and this immediately put us in mind that we had neglected to pay honour due to our friends on the other side of the Channel: Voltaire, the patriarch of levity, and Rousseau, the father of sentiment; Montaigne and Rabelais (great in wisdom and in wit); Molière and that illustrious group that are collected round him (in the print of that subject) to hear him read his comedy of the *Tartuffe* at the house of Ninon; Racine, La Fontaine, Rochefoucalt, St. Evremont, etc.

“There is one person,” said a shrill, querulous voice, “I would rather see than all these—Don Quixote!”

“Come, come!” said Hunt; “I thought we should have no heroes, real or fabulous. What say you, Mr. Lamb? Are you for eking out your shadowy list with such names as Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Tamerlane, or Ghengis Khan?”—“Excuse me,” said Lamb; “on

the subject of characters in active life, plotters and disturbers of the world, I have a crotchet of my own, which I beg leave to reserve."—"No, no! come, out with your worthies!"—"What do you think of Guy Fawkes and Judas Iscariot?" Hunt turned an eye upon him like a wild Indian, but cordial and full of smothered glee. "Your most exquisite reason!" was echoed on all sides; and Ayrton thought that Lamb had now fairly entangled himself. "Why I cannot but think," retorted he of the wistful countenance, "that Guy Fawkes, that poor, fluttering annual scarecrow of straw and rags, is an ill-used gentleman. I would give something to see him sitting pale and emaciated, surrounded by his matches and his barrels of gunpowder, and expecting the moment that was to transport him to Paradise for his heroic self-devotion; but if I say any more, there is that fellow Godwin will make something of it. And as to Judas Iscariot, my reason is different. I would fain see the face of him who, having dipped his hand in the same dish with the Son of Man, could afterwards betray him. I have no conception of such a thing; nor have I ever seen any picture (not even Leonardo's very fine one) that gave me the least idea of it."—"You have said enough, Mr. Lamb, to justify your choice."

"Oh! ever right, Menenius—ever right!"

"There is only one other person I can ever think of after this," continued Lamb; but without mentioning a name that once put on a semblance of mortality. "If Shakespear was to come into the room, we should all rise up to meet him; but if that person was to come

into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment ! ”

As a lady present seemed now to get uneasy at the turn the conversation had taken, we rose up to go. The morning broke with that dim, dubious light by which Giotto, Cimabue, and Ghirlandaio must have seen to paint their earliest works ; and we parted to meet again and renew similar topics at night, the next night, and the night after that, till that night overspread Europe which saw no dawn. The same event, in truth, broke up our little Congress that broke up the great one. But that was to meet again : our deliberations have never been resumed.

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ON THE CONVERSATION OF AUTHORS—I

AN author is bound to write—well or ill, wisely or foolishly: it is his trade. But I do not see that he is bound to talk, any more than he is bound to dance, or ride, or fence better than other people. Reading, study, silence, thought, are a bad introduction to loquacity. It would be sooner learnt of chambermaids and tapsters. He understands the art and mystery of his own profession, which is bookmaking: what right has any one to expect or require him to do more—to make a bow gracefully on entering or leaving a room, to make love charmingly, or to make a fortune at all? In all things there is a division of labour. A lord is no less amorous for writing ridiculous love-letters, nor a General less successful for wanting wit and honesty. Why then may not a poor author say nothing, and yet pass muster? Set him on the top of a stage-coach, he will make no figure; he is *mum-chance*, while the slang-wit flies about as fast as the dust, with the crack of the whip and the clatter of the horses' heels: put him in a ring of boxers, he is a poor creature—

“ And of his port as meek as is a maid.”

Introduce him to a tea-party of milliner's girls, and they are ready to split their sides with laughing at him: over

his bottle, he is dry : in the drawing-room, rude or awkward : he is too refined for the vulgar, too clownish for the fashionable :—" he is one that cannot make a good leg, one that cannot eat a mess of broth cleanly, one that cannot ride a horse without spur-galling, one that cannot salute a woman, and look on her directly : "—in courts, in camps, in town and country, he is a cypher or a butt : he is good for nothing but a laughing-stock or a scarecrow. You can scarcely get a word out of him for love or money. He knows nothing. He has no notion of pleasure or business, or of what is going on in the world ; he does not understand cookery (unless he is a doctor in divinity) nor surgery, nor chemistry (unless he is a *Quidnunc*), nor mechanics, nor husbandry and tillage (unless he is as great an admirer of Tull's Husbandry, and has profited as much by it as the philosopher of Botley)—no, nor music, painting, the Drama, nor the Fine Arts in general.

" What the deuce is it then, my good sir, that he does understand, or know anything about ? "

" BOOKS, VENUS, BOOKS ! "

" What books ? "

" Not receipt-books, Madona, nor account-books, nor books of pharmacy, or the veterinary art (they belong to their respective callings and handicrafts), but books of liberal taste and general knowledge."

" What do you mean by that general knowledge which implies not a knowledge of things in general, but an ignorance (by your own account) of every one in particular : or by that liberal taste which scorns the pursuits and acquirements of the rest of the world in succession,

and is confined exclusively, and by way of excellence, to what nobody takes an interest in but yourself, and a few idlers like yourself? Is this what the critics mean by the *belles-lettres*, and the study of humanity?"

Book-knowledge, in a word, then, is knowledge *communicable by books*: and it is general and liberal for this reason, that it is intelligible and interesting on the bare suggestion. That to which any one feels a romantic attachment, merely from finding it in a book, must be interesting in itself: that which he instantly forms a lively and entire conception of, from seeing a few marks and scratches upon paper, must be taken from common nature: that which, the first time you meet with it, seizes upon the attention as a curious speculation, must exercise the general faculties of the human mind. There are certain broader aspects of society and views of things common to every subject, and more or less cognizable to every mind; and these the scholar treats and founds his claim to general attention upon them, without being chargeable with pendency. The minute descriptions of fishing-tackle, of baits and flies in Walton's Complete Angler, make that work a great favourite with sportsmen: the alloy of an amiable humanity, and the modest but touching descriptions of familiar incidents and rural objects scattered through it, have made it an equal favourite with every reader of taste and feeling. Montaigne's Essays, Dilworth's Spelling Book, and Fearn's Treatise on Contingent Remainders, are all equally books, but not equally adapted for all classes of readers. The two last are of no use but to school-masters and lawyers: but the first

is a work we may recommend to any one to read who has ever thought at all, or who would learn to think justly on any subject. Persons of different trades and professions—the mechanic, the shopkeeper, the medical practitioner, the artist, &c., may all have great knowledge and ingenuity in their several vocations, the details of which will be very edifying to themselves, and just as incomprehensible to their neighbours: but over and above this professional and technical knowledge, they must be supposed to have a stock of common sense and common feeling to furnish subjects for common conversation, or to give them any pleasure in each other's company. It is to this common stock of ideas, spread over the surface, or striking its roots into the very centre of society, that the popular writer appeals, and not in vain; for he finds readers. It is of this finer essence of wisdom and humanity, “etherial mould, sky-tinctured,” that books of the better sort are made. They contain the language of thought. It must happen that, in the course of time and the variety of human capacity, some persons will have struck out finer observations, reflections, and sentiments than others. These they have committed to books of memory, have bequeathed as a lasting legacy to posterity; and such persons have become standard authors. We visit at the shrine, drink in some measure of the inspiration, and cannot easily “breathe in other air less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits.” Are we to be blamed for this, because the vulgar and illiterate do not always understand us? The fault is rather in them, who are “confined and cabin'd in,” each in their own particular sphere and compartment

of ideas, and have not the same refined medium of communication or abstracted topics of discourse. Bring a number of literary, or of illiterate persons together, perfect strangers to each other, and see which party will make the best company. "Verily, we have our reward." We have made our election, and have no reason to repent it, if we were wise. But the misfortune is, we wish to have all the advantages on one side. We grudge, and cannot reconcile it to ourselves, that any one "should go about to cozen fortune, without the stamp of learning!" We think "because we are *scholars*, there shall be no more cakes and ale!" We don't know how to account for it, that bar-maids should gossip, or ladies whisper, or bullies roar, or fools laugh, or knaves thrive, without having gone through the same course of select study that we have! This vanity is preposterous, and carries its own punishment with it. Books are a world in themselves, it is true; but they are not the only world. The world itself is a volume larger than all the libraries in it. Learning is a sacred deposit from the experience of ages; but it has not put all future experience on the shelf, or debarred the common herd of mankind from the use of their hands, tongues, eyes, ears, or understandings. Taste is a luxury for the privileged few: but it would be hard upon those who have not the same standard of refinement in their own minds that we suppose ourselves to have, if this should prevent them from having recourse, as usual, to their old frolics, coarse jokes, and horse-play, and getting through the wear and tear of the world, with such homely sayings and shrewd helps as they may. Happy

is it, that the mass of mankind eat and drink, and sleep, and perform their several tasks, and do as they like without us—caring nothing for our scribblings, our carpings, and our quibbles ; and moving on the same, in spite of our fine-spun distinctions, fantastic theories, and lines of demarcation, which are like the chalk-figures drawn on ball-room floors to be danced out before morning ! In the field opposite the window where I write this, there is a country-girl picking stones : in the one next it, there are several poor women weeding the blue and red flowers from the corn : farther on, are two boys, tending a flock of sheep. What do they know or care about what I am writing about them, or ever will—or what would they be the better for it, if they did ? Or why need we despise

“ The wretched slave,

Who like a lackey, from the rise to the set,
Sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and all night
Sleeps in Elysium ; next day, after dawn,
Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse ;
And follows so the ever-running year
With profitable labour to his grave ? ”

Is not this life as sweet as writing *Ephemerides* ? But we put that which flutters the brain idly for a moment, and then is heard no more, in competition with nature, which exists every where, and lasts always. We not only underrate the force of nature, and make too much of art—but we also over-rate our own accomplishments and advantages derived from art. In the presence of clownish ignorance, or of persons without any great

pretensions, real or affected, we are very much inclined to take upon ourselves, as the virtual representatives of science, art, and literature. We have a strong itch to show off and do the honours of civilization for all the great men whose works we have ever read, and whose names our auditors have never heard of, as noblemen's lacqueys, in the absence of their masters, give themselves airs of superiority over every one else. But though we have read Congreve, a stage-coachman may be an overmatch for us in wit: though we are deep-versed in the excellence of Shakespear's colloquial style, a village beldam may outscold us: though we have read Machiavel in the original Italian, we may be easily outwitted by a clown: and though we have cried our eyes out over the New Eloise, a poor shepherd lad, who hardly knows how to spell his own name, may "tell his tale, under the hawthorn in the dale," and prove a more thriving wooer. What then is the advantage we possess over the meanest of the mean? Why this, that we have read Congreve, Shakespear, Machiavel, the New Eloise;—not that we are to have their wit, genius, shrewdness, or melting tenderness.

From speculative pursuits we must be satisfied with speculative benefits. From reading, too, we learn to write. If we have had the pleasure of studying the highest models of perfection in their kind, and can hope to leave any thing ourselves, however slight, to be looked upon as a model, or even a good copy in its way, we may think ourselves pretty well off, without engrossing all the privileges of learning, and all the blessings of ignorance into the bargain.

It has been made a question whether there have not been individuals in common life of greater talents and powers of mind than the most celebrated writers—whether, for instance, such or such a Liverpool merchant, or Manchester manufacturer, was not a more sensible man than Montaigne, of a longer reach of understanding than the Viscount of St. Albans. There is no saying, unless some of these illustrious obscure had communicated their important discoveries to the world. But then they would have been authors ! On the other hand, there is a set of critics who fall into the contrary error ; and suppose that unless the proof of capacity is laid before all the world, the capacity itself cannot exist ; looking upon all those who have not commenced authors, as literally “ stocks and stones, and worse than senseless things.” I remember trying to convince a person of this class, that a young lady, whom he knew something of, the niece of a celebrated authoress, had just the same sort of fine *tact* and ironical turn in conversation, that her relative had shown in her writings when young. The only answer I could get was an incredulous smile, and the observation that when she wrote any thing as good as —, or —, he might think her as clever. I said all I meant was, that she had the same family talents, and asked whether he thought that if Miss — had not been very clever, as a mere girl, before she wrote her novels, she would ever have written them ? It was all in vain. He still stuck to his text, and was convinced that the niece was a little fool compared to her aunt at the same age ; and if he had known the aunt formerly, he would have had just the same opinion of *her*. My

friend was one of those who have a settled persuasion that it is the book that makes the author, and not the author the book. That's a strange opinion for a great philosopher to hold. But he wilfully shuts his eyes to the germs and indistinct workings of genius, and treats them with supercilious indifference, till they stare him in the face through the press ; and then takes cognizance only of the overt acts and published evidence. This is neither a proof of wisdom, nor the way to be wise. It is partly pedantry and prejudice, and partly feebleness of judgment and want of magnanimity. He dare as little commit himself on the character of books, as of individuals, till they are stamped by the public. If you show him any work for his approbation, he asks, " Whose is the superscription ? "—He judges of genius by its shadow, reputation—of the metal by the coin. He is just the reverse of another person whom I know—for, as G—— never allows a particle of merit to any one till it is acknowledged by the whole world, C—— withholds his tribute of applause from every person, in whom any mortal but himself can descry the least glimpse of understanding. He would be thought to look farther into a millstone than any body else. He would have others see with his eyes, and take their opinions from him on trust, in spite of their senses. The more obscure and defective the indications of merit, the greater his sagacity and candour in being the first to point them out. He looks upon what he nicknames *a man of genius*, but as the breath of his nostrils, and the clay in the potter's hands. If any such inert, unconscious mass, under the fostering care of the modern Prometheus, is kindled into life,—

begins to see, speak, and move, so as to attract the notice of other people,—our jealous patroniser of latent worth in that case throws aside, scorns, and hates his own handy-work ; and deserts his intellectual offspring from the moment they can go alone and shift for themselves.—But to pass on to our more immediate subject.

The conversation of authors is not so good as might be imagined : but, such as it is (and with rare exceptions) it is better than any other. The proof of which is, that, when you are used to it, you cannot put up with any other. That of mixed company becomes utterly intolerable—you cannot sit out a common tea and card party, at least, if they pretend to talk at all. You are obliged in despair to cut all your old acquaintance who are not *au fait* on the prevailing and most smartly contested topics, who are not imbued with the high gusto of criticism and *virtù*. You cannot bear to hear a friend whom you have not seen for many years, tell at how much a yard he sells his laces and tapes, when he means to move into his next house, when he heard last from his relations in the country, whether trade is alive or dead, or whether Mr. Such-a-one gets to look old. This sort of neighbourly gossip will not go down after the high-raised tone of literary conversation. The last may be very absurd, very unsatisfactory, and full of turbulence and heart-burnings ; but it has a zest in it which more ordinary topics of news or family-affairs do not supply. Neither will the conversation of what we understand by *gentlemen* and men of fashion, do after that of men of letters. It is flat, insipid, stale, and un-

profitable, in the comparison. They talk about much the same things, pictures, poetry, politics, plays ; but they do it worse, and at a sort of vapid secondhand. They, in fact, talk out of newspapers and magazines, what *we write there*. They do not feel the same interest in the subjects they affect to handle with an air of fashionable condescension, nor have they the same knowledge of them, if they were ever so much in earnest in displaying it. If it were not for the wine and the dessert, no author in his senses would accept an invitation to a well-dressed dinner-party, except out of pure good-nature and unwillingness to disoblige by his refusal. Persons in high life talk almost entirely by rote. There are certain established modes of address, and certain answers to them expected as a matter of course, as a point of etiquette. The studied forms of politeness do not give the greatest possible scope to an exuberance of wit or fancy. The fear of giving offence destroys sincerity, and without sincerity there can be no true enjoyment of society, nor unfettered exertion of intellectual activity.—Those who have been accustomed to live with the great are hardly considered as conversible persons in literary society. They are not to be talked with, any more than puppets or echos. They have no opinions but what will please ; and you naturally turn away, as a waste of time and words, from attending to a person who just before assented to what you said, and whom you find, the moment after, from something that unexpectedly or perhaps by design drops from him, to be of a totally different way of thinking. This *bush-fighting* is not regarded as fair play among scientific men. As fashion-

able conversation is a sacrifice to politeness, so the conversation of low life is nothing but rudeness. They contradict you without giving a reason, or if they do, it is a very bad one—swear, talk loud, repeat the same thing fifty times over, get to calling names, and from words proceed to blows. You cannot make companions of servants, or persons in an inferior station in life. You may talk to them on matters of business, and what they have to do for you (as lords talk to bruisers on subjects of *fancy*, or country-squires to their grooms on horse-racing) but out of that narrow sphere, to any general topic, you cannot lead them ; the conversation soon flags, and you go back to the old question, or are obliged to break up the sitting for want of ideas in common. The conversation of authors is better than that of most professions. It is better than that of lawyers, who talk nothing but *double entendre*—than that of physicians, who talk of the approaching deaths of the College, or the marriage of some new practitioner with some rich widow—than that of divines, who talk of the last place they dined at—than that of University-men, who make stale puns, repeat the refuse of the London newspapers, and affect an ignorance of Greek and mathematics—it is better than that of players, who talk of nothing but the green-room, and rehearse the scholar, the wit, or the fine gentleman, like a part on the stage—or than that of ladies, who, whatever you talk of, think of nothing, and expect you to think of nothing, but themselves. It is not easy to keep up a conversation with women in company. It is thought a piece of rudeness to differ from them : it is not quite fair to ask them a reason for what they say.

You are afraid of pressing too hard upon them: but where you cannot differ openly and unreservedly, you cannot heartily agree. It is not so in France. There the women talk of things in general, and reason better than the men in this country. They are mistresses of the intellectual foils. They are adepts in all the topics. They know what is to be said for and against all sorts of questions, and are lively and full of mischief into the bargain. They are very subtle. They put you to your trumps immediately. Your logic is more in requisition even than your gallantry. You must argue as well as bow yourself into the good graces of these modern Amazons. What a situation for an Englishman to be placed in! *

The fault of literary conversation in general is its too great tenaciousness. It fastens upon a subject, and will not let it go. It resembles a battle rather than a skirmish, and makes a toil of a pleasure. Perhaps it does this from necessity, from a consciousness of wanting the more familiar graces, the power to sport and trifle, to touch lightly and adorn agreeably, every view or turn of a question *en passant*, as it arises. Those who have a reputation to lose are too ambitious of shining, to please. "To excel in conversation," said an ingenious man, "one must not be always striving to say good things: to say one good thing, one must say many bad, and more in-

* The topics of metaphysical argument having got into female society in France, is a proof how much they must have been discussed there generally, and how unfounded the charge is which we bring against them of excessive thoughtlessness and frivolity. The French (taken all together) are a more sensible, reflecting, and better informed people than the English.

different ones." This desire to shine without the means at hand, often makes men silent :—

" The fear of being silent strikes us dumb."

A writer who has been accustomed to take a connected view of a difficult question, and to work it out gradually in all its bearings, may be very deficient in that quickness and ease, which men of the world, who are in the habit of hearing a variety of opinions, who pick up an observation on one subject, and another on another, and who care about none any farther than the passing away of an idle hour, usually acquire. An author has studied a particular point—he has read, he has inquired, he has thought a great deal upon it : he is not contented to take it up casually in common with others, to throw out a hint, to propose an objection : he will either remain silent, uneasy, and dissatisfied, or he will begin at the beginning and go through with it to the end. He is for taking the whole responsibility upon himself. He would be thought to understand the subject better than others, or indeed would show that nobody else knows any thing about it. There are always three or four points on which the literary novice at his first outset in life fancies he can enlighten every company, and bear down all opposition : but he is cured of this Quixotic and pugnacious spirit, as he goes more into the world, where he finds that there are other opinions and other pretensions to be adjusted besides his own. When this asperity wears off, and a certain scholastic precocity is mellowed down, the conversation of men of letters becomes both interesting and

instructive. Men of the world have no fixed principles, no groundwork of thought: mere scholars have too much an object, a theory always in view, to which they wrest every thing, and not unfrequently, common sense itself. By mixing with society, they rub off their hardness of manner, and impracticable, offensive singularity, while they retain a greater depth and coherence of understanding. There is more to be learnt from them than from their books. This was a remark of Rousseau's, and it is a very true one. In the confidence and unreserve of private intercourse, they are more at liberty to say what they think, to put the subject in different and opposite points of view, to illustrate it more briefly and pithily by familiar expressions, by an appeal to individual character and personal knowledge—to bring in the limitation, to obviate misconception, to state difficulties on their own side of the argument, and answer them as well as they can. This would hardly agree with the prudery, and somewhat ostentatious claims of authorship. Dr. Johnson's conversation in Boswell's Life is much better than his published works: and the fragments of the opinions of celebrated men, preserved in their letters or in anecdotes of them, are justly sought after as invaluable for the same reason. For instance, what a fund of sense there is in Grimm's Memoirs! We thus get at the essence of what is contained in their more laboured productions, without the affectation of formality.—Argument, again, is the death of conversation, if carried on in a spirit of hostility: but discussion is a pleasant and profitable thing, where you advance and defend your opinions as far as you can,

and admit the truth of what is objected against them with equal impartiality ; in short, where you do not pretend to set up for an oracle, but freely declare what you really know about any question, or suggest what has struck you as throwing a new light upon it, and let it pass for what it is worth. This tone of conversation was well described by Dr. Johnson, when he said of some party at which he had been present the night before—" We had good talk, sir ! " As a general rule, there is no conversation worth any thing but between friends, or those who agree in the same leading views of a subject. Nothing was ever learnt by either side in a dispute. You contradict one another, will not allow a grain of sense in what your adversary advances, are blind to whatever makes against yourself, dare not look the question fairly in the face, so that you cannot avail yourself even of your real advantages, insist most on what you feel to be the weakest points of your argument, and get more and more absurd, dogmatical, and violent every moment. Disputes for victory generally end to the dissatisfaction of all parties ; and the one recorded in *Gil Blas* breaks up just as it ought. I once knew a very ingenious man, than whom, to take him in the way of common chit-chat or fireside gossip, no one could be more entertaining or rational. He would make an apt classical quotation, propose an explanation of a curious passage in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, detect a metaphysical error in Locke, would infer the volatility of the French character from the chapter in *Sterne* where the Count mistakes the feigned name of *Yorick* for a proof of his being the identical imaginary character in *Hamlet* (*Et vous êtes*

Yorick!)—thus confounding words with things twice over—but let a difference of opinion be once hitched in, and it was all over with him. His only object from that time was to shut out common sense, and to be proof against conviction. He would argue the most ridiculous point (such as that there were two original languages) for hours together, nay, through the horologe. You would not suppose it was the same person. He was like an obstinate run-away horse, that takes the bit in his mouth, and becomes mischievous and unmanageable. He had made up his mind to one thing, not to admit a single particle of what any one else said for or against him. It was all the difference between a man drunk or sober, sane or mad. It is the same when he once gets the pen in his hand. He has been trying to prove a contradiction in terms for the ten last years of his life, *viz.* that the Bourbons have the same right to the throne of France that the Brunswick family have to the throne of England. Many people think there is a want of honesty or a want of understanding in this. There is neither. But he will persist in an argument to the last pinch ; he will yield, in absurdity, to no man !

This litigious humour is bad enough : but there is one character still worse, that of a person who goes into company, not to contradict, but to *talk at* you. This is the greatest nuisance in civilised society. Such a person does not come armed to defend himself at all points; but to unsettle, if he can, and throw a slur on all your favourite opinions. If he has a notion that any one in the room is fond of poetry, he immediately volunteers a contemptuous tirade against the idle jingle of verse:

If he suspects you have a delight in pictures, he endeavours, not by fair argument, but by a side-wind, to put you out of conceit with so frivolous an art. If you have a taste for music, he does not think much good is to be done by this tickling of the ears. If you speak in praise of a comedy, he does not see the use of wit : if you say you have been to a tragedy, he shakes his head at this mockery of human misery, and thinks it ought to be prohibited. He tries to find out beforehand whatever it is that you take a particular pride or pleasure in, that he may annoy your self-love in the tenderest point (as if he were probing a wound) and make you dissatisfied with yourself and your pursuits for several days afterwards. A person might as well make a practice of throwing out scandalous aspersions against your dearest friends or nearest relations, by way of ingratiating himself into your favour. Such ill-timed impertinence is “villainous, and shews a pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.”

The soul of conversation is sympathy.—Authors should converse chiefly with authors, and their talk should be of books. “When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war.” There is nothing so pedantic as pretending not to be pedantic. No man can get above his pursuit in life : it is getting above himself, which is impossible. There is a Free-masonry in all things. You can only speak to be understood, but this you cannot be, except by those who are in the secret. Hence an argument has been drawn to supersede the necessity of conversation altogether ; for it has been said, that there is no use in talking to people of sense, who know all that

you can tell them, nor to fools, who will not be instructed. There is, however, the smallest encouragement to proceed, when you are conscious that the more you really enter into a subject, the farther you will be from the comprehension of your hearers—and that the more proofs you give of any position, the more odd and out-of-the-way they will think your notions. C[oleridge] is the only person who can talk to all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, without caring a farthing for their understanding one word he says—and *he* talks only for admiration and to be listened to, and accordingly the least interruption puts him out. I firmly believe he would make just the same impression on half his audiences, if he purposely repeated absolute nonsense with the same voice and manner and inexhaustible flow of undulating speech! In general, wit shines only by reflection. You must take your cue from your company—must rise as they rise, and sink as they fall. You must see that your good things, your knowing allusions, are not flung away, like the pearls in the adage. What a check it is to be asked a foolish question ; to find that the first principles are not understood! You are thrown on your back immediately, the conversation is stopped like a country-dance by those who do not know the figure. But when a set of adepts, of *illuminati*, get about a question, it is worth while to hear them talk. They may snarl and quarrel over it, like dogs ; but they pick it bare to the bone, they masticate it thoroughly.

The London Magazine, September 1820.
The Plain Speaker, 1826.

ON THE CONVERSATION OF AUTHORS—II

THIS was the case formerly at L[amb]’s—where we used to have many lively skirmishes at their Thursday evening parties. I doubt whether the Small-coal man’s musical parties could exceed them. Oh ! for the pen of John Buncle to consecrate a *petit souvenir* to their memory !—There was L[amb] himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun, and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears : and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen, laughing, hare-brained vein of home-felt truth ! What choice venom ! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table ! How we skimmed the cream of criticism ! How we got into the heart of controversy ! How we picked out the marrow of authors ! “ And, in our flowing cups, many a good name and true was freshly remembered.” Recollect (most sage and critical reader) that in all this I was but a guest ! Need I go over the names ? They were but the old everlasting set —Milton and Shakespear, Pope and Dryden, Steele and

Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollet, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, the Cartoons at Hampton-court, and all those things, that, having once been, must ever be. The Scotch Novels had not then been heard of: so we said nothing about them. In general, we were hard upon the moderns. The author of the Rambler was only tolerated in Boswell's Life of him; and it was as much as any one could do to edge in a word for Junius. L[amb] could not bear Gil Blas. This was a fault. I remember the greatest triumph I ever had was in persuading him, after some years' difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollet. On one occasion, he was for making out a list of persons famous in history that one would wish to see again—at the head of whom were Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus—but we black-balled most of his list! But with what a gusto would he describe his favourite authors, Donne, or Sir Philip Sidney, and call their most crabbed passages *delicious*! He tried them on his palate as epicures taste olives, and his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue. With what discrimination he hinted a defect in what he admired most—as in saying that the display of the sumptuous banquet in Paradise Regained was not in true keeping, as the simplest fare was all that was necessary to tempt the extremity of hunger—and stating that Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost were too much like married people. He has furnished many a text for C[oleridge] to preach upon. There was no fuss or cant about him: nor were his sweets or his sour[s] ever diluted with one particle of affectation. I cannot say that the

party at L[amb]'s were all of one description. There were honorary members, lay brothers. Wit and good fellowship was the motto inscribed over the door. When a stranger came in, it was not asked, "Has he written any thing?"—we were above that pedantry; but we waited to see what he could do. If he could take a hand at piquet, he was welcome to sit down. If a person liked any thing, if he took snuff heartily, it was sufficient. He would understand, by analogy, the pungency of other things, besides Irish blackguard, or Scotch rappee. A character was good any where, in a room or on paper. But we abhorred insipidity, affectation, and fine gentlemen. There was one of our party who never failed to mark "two for his Nob" at cribbage, and he was thought no mean person. This was Ned P[hillips], and a better fellow in his way breathes not. There was —, who asserted some incredible matter of fact as a likely paradox, and settled all controversies by an *ipse dixit*, a *flat* of his will, hammering out many a hard theory on the anvil of his brain—the Baron Munchausen of politics and practical philosophy:—there was Captain [Burney], who had you at an advantage by never understanding you:—there was Jem White, the author of Falstaff's Letters, who the other day left this dull world to go in search of more kindred spirits, "turning like the latter end of a lover's lute":—there was A[yrton], who sometimes dropped in, the Will Honeycomb of our set—and Mrs. R[eynolds], who being of a quiet turn, loved to hear a noisy debate. An utterly uninformed person might have supposed this a scene of vulgar confusion and uproar. While the most critical question was pending, while the

most difficult problem in philosophy was solving, P—— cried out, " That's game," and M. B. muttered a quotation over the last remains of a veal-pie at a side-table. Once, and once only, the literary interest overcame the general. For C[oleridge] was riding the high German horse, and demonstrating the Categories of the Transcendental philosophy to the author of the *Road to Ruin* ; who insisted on his knowledge of German, and German metaphysics, having read the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the original. " My dear Mr. Holcroft," said C[oleridge], in a tone of infinitely provoking conciliation, " you really put me in mind of a sweet pretty German girl, about fifteen, that I met with in the Hartz forest in Germany—and who one day, as I was reading the *Limits of the Knowable* and the *Unknowable*, the profoundest of all his works, with great attention, came behind my chair, and leaning over, said, *What, you* read Kant ? Why, *I* that am German born, don't understand him ! " This was too much to bear, and Holcroft, starting up, called out in no measured tone, " Mr. C[oleridge], you are the most eloquent man I ever met with, and the most troublesome with your eloquence ! " P[hillips] held the cribbage-peg that was to mark him game, suspended in his hand ; and the whist table was silent for a moment. I saw Holcroft down stairs, and, on coming to the landing-place in Mitre-court, he stopped me to observe, that " he thought Mr. C[oleridge] a very clever man, with a great command of language, but that he feared he did not always affix very precise ideas to the words he used." After he was gone, we had our laugh out, and went on with the argument on the nature of Reason, the Imagination, and the

Will. I wish I could find a publisher for it : it would make a supplement to the *Biographia Literaria* in a volume and a half octavo.

Those days are over ! An event, the name of which I wish never to mention, broke up our party, like a bomb-shell thrown into the room : and now we seldom meet—

“ Like angels’ visits, short and far between.”

There is no longer the same set of persons, nor of associations. L[amb] does not live where he did. By shifting his abode, his notions seem less fixed. He does not wear his old snuff-coloured coat and breeches. It looks like an alteration in his style. An author and a wit should have a separate costume, a particular cloth : he should present something positive and singular to the mind, like Mr. Douce of the Museum. Our faith in the religion of letters will not bear to be taken to pieces, and put together again by caprice or accident. L. H[unt] goes there sometimes. He has a fine vinous spirit about him, and tropical blood in his veins : but he is better at his own table. He has a great flow of pleasantry and delightful animal spirits : but his hits do not tell like L[amb]’s ; you cannot repeat them the next day. He requires not only to be appreciated, but to have a select circle of admirers and devotees, to feel himself quite at home. He sits at the head of a party with great gaiety and grace ; has an elegant manner and turn of features ; is never at a loss—*aliquando sufflaminandus erat*—has continual sportive sallies of wit or fancy ; tells a story capitally ; mimics an actor, or an acquaintance to

admiration ; laughs with great glee and good humour at his own or other people's jokes ; understands the point of an equivoque, or an observation immediately ; has a taste and knowledge of books, of music, of medals ; manages an argument adroitly ; is genteel and gallant, and has a set of bye-phrases and quaint allusions always at hand to produce a laugh :—if he has a fault, it is that he does not listen so well as he speaks, is impatient of interruption, and is fond of being looked up to, without considering by whom. I believe, however, he has pretty well seen the folly of this. Neither is his ready display of personal accomplishment and variety of resources an advantage to his writings. They sometimes present a desultory and slip-shod appearance, owing to this very circumstance. The same things that tell, perhaps, best, to a private circle round the fireside, are not always intelligible to the public, nor does he take pains to make them so. He is too confident and secure of his audience. That which may be entertaining enough with the assistance of a certain liveliness of manner, may read very flat on paper, because it is abstracted from all the circumstances that had set it off to advantage. A writer should recollect that he has only to trust to the immediate impression of words, like a musician who sings without the accompaniment of an instrument. There is nothing to help out, or slubber over, the defects of the voice in the one case, nor of the style in the other. The reader may, if he pleases, get a very good idea of L. H[unt]'s conversation from a very agreeable paper he has lately published, called the *Indicator*, than which nothing can be more happily conceived or executed.

The art of conversation is the art of hearing as well as of being heard. Authors in general are not good listeners. Some of the best talkers are, on this account, the worst company ; and some who are very indifferent, but very great talkers, are as bad. It is sometimes wonderful to see how a person, who has been entertaining or tiring a company by the hour together, drops his countenance as if he had been shot, or had been seized with a sudden lock-jaw, the moment any one interposes a single observation. The best converser I know is, however, the best listener. I mean Mr. Northcote, the painter. Painters by their profession are not bound to shine in conversation, and they shine the more. He lends his ear to an observation, as if you had brought him a piece of news, and enters into it with as much avidity and earnestness, as if it interested himself personally. If he repeats an old remark or story, it is with the same freshness and point as for the first time. It always arises out of the occasion, and has the stamp of originality. There is no parroting of himself. His look is a continual, ever-varying history-piece of what passes in his mind. His face is as a book. There need no marks of interjection or interrogation to what he says. His manner is quite picturesque. There is an excess of character and *naïveté* that never tires. His thoughts bubble up and sparkle, like beads on old wine. The fund of anecdote, the collection of curious particulars, is enough to set up any common retailer of jests, that dines out every day ; but these are not strung together like a row of galley-slaves, but are always introduced to illustrate some argument or bring out some fine distinction of character.

The mixture of spleen adds to the sharpness of the point, like poisoned arrows. Mr. Northcote enlarges with enthusiasm on the old painters, and tells good things of the new. The only thing he ever vexed me in was his liking the *Catalogue Raisonné*. I had almost as soon hear him talk of Titian's pictures (which he does with tears in his eyes, and looking just like them) as see the originals, and I had rather hear him talk of Sir Joshua's than see them. He is the last of that school who knew Goldsmith and Johnson. How finely he describes Pope ! His elegance of mind, his figure, his character were not unlike his own. He does not resemble a modern Englishman, but puts one in mind of a Roman Cardinal or Spanish Inquisitor. I never ate or drank with Mr. Northcote ; but I have lived on his conversation with undiminished relish ever since I can remember,—and when I leave it, I come out into the street with feelings lighter and more ethereal than I have at any other time.

—One of his *tête-à-têtes* would at any time make an Essay ; but he cannot write himself, because he loses himself in the connecting passages, is fearful of the effect, and wants the habit of bringing his ideas into one focus or point of view. A *lens* is necessary to collect the diverging rays, the refracted and broken angular lights of conversation on paper. Contradiction is half the battle in talking—the being startled by what others say, and having to answer on the spot. You have to defend yourself, paragraph by paragraph, parenthesis within parenthesis. Perhaps it might be supposed that a person who excels in conversation and cannot write, would succeed better in dialogue. But the stimulus, the im-

mediate irritation would be wanting; and the work would read flatter than ever, from not having the very thing it pretended to have.

Lively sallies and connected discourse are very different things. There are many persons of that impatient and restless turn of mind, that they cannot wait a moment for a conclusion, or follow up the thread of any argument. In the hurry of conversation their ideas are somehow huddled into sense; but in the intervals of thought, leave a great gap between. Montesquieu said, he often lost an idea before he could find words for it: yet he dictated, by way of saving time, to an amanuensis. This last is, in my opinion, a vile method, and a solecism in authorship. Horne Tooke, among other paradoxes, used to maintain, that no one could write a good style who was not in the habit of talking and hearing the sound of his own voice. He might as well have said that no one could relish a good style without reading it aloud, as we find common people do to assist their apprehension. But there is a method of trying periods on the ear, or weighing them with the scales of the breath, without any articulate sound. Authors, as they write, may be said to "hear a sound so fine, there's nothing lives 'twixt it and silence." Even musicians generally compose in their heads. I agree that no style is good, that is not fit to be spoken or read aloud with effect. This holds true not only of emphasis and cadence, but also with regard to natural idiom and colloquial freedom. Sterne's was in this respect the best style that ever was written. You fancy that you hear the people talking. For a contrary reason,

no college-man writes a good style, or understands it when written. Fine writing is with him all verbiage and monotony—a translation into classical centos or hexameter lines.

That which I have just mentioned is among many instances I could give of ingenious absurdities advanced by Mr. Tooke in the heat and pride of controversy. A person who knew him well, and greatly admired his talents, said of him that he never (to his recollection) heard him defend an opinion which he thought right, or in which he believed him to be himself sincere. He indeed provoked his antagonists into the toils by the very extravagance of his assertions, and the teasing sophistry by which he rendered them plausible. His temper was prompter to his skill. He had the manners of a man of the world, with great scholastic resources. He flung every one else off his guard, and was himself immoveable. I never knew any one who did not admit his superiority in this kind of warfare. He put a full stop to one of C[oleridge]’s long-winded prefatory apologies for his youth and inexperience, by saying abruptly, “ Speak up, young man ! ” and, at another time, silenced a learned professor, by desiring an explanation of a word which the other frequently used, and which, he said, he had been many years trying to get at the meaning of,—the copulative *Is* ! He was the best intellectual fencer of his day. He made strange havoc of Fuseli’s fantastic hieroglyphics, violent humours, and oddity of dialect.—Curran, who was sometimes of the same party, was lively and animated in convivial conversation, but dull in argument ; nay, averse to any thing like reasoning or serious obser-

vation, and had the worst taste I ever knew. His favourite critical topics were to abuse Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Indeed, he confessed a want of sufficient acquaintance with books when he found himself in literary society in London. He and Sheridan once dined at John Kemble's with Mrs. Inchbald and Mary Woolstonecroft, when the discourse almost wholly turned on Love, "from noon to dewy eve, a summer's day!" What a subject! What speakers, and what hearers! What would I not give to have been there, had I not learned it all from the bright eyes of *Amaryllis*, and may one day make a *Table-talk* of it!—Peter Pindar was rich in anecdote and grotesque humour, and profound in technical knowledge both of music, poetry, and painting, but he was gross and over-bearing. Wordsworth sometimes talks like a man inspired on subjects of poetry (his own out of the question)—Coleridge well on every subject, and Godwin on none. To finish this subject—Mrs. M[ontagu]'s conversation is as fine-cut as her features, and I like to sit in the room with that sort of coronet face. What she says leaves a flavour, like fine green tea. H[un]t's is like champaigne, and N[orthcote]'s like anchovy sandwiches. Haydon's is like a game at trap-ball: L[amb]'s like snap-dragon: and my own (if I do not mistake the matter) is not very much unlike a game at nine-pins! . . . One source of the conversation of authors, is the character of other authors, and on that they are rich indeed. What things they say! What stories they tell of one another, more particularly of their friends! If I durst only give some of these confidential communications! . . . The reader

may perhaps think the foregoing a specimen of them :—but indeed he is mistaken.

I do not know of any greater impertinence, than for an obscure individual to set about pumping a character of celebrity. “Bring him to me,” said a Doctor Tronchin, speaking of Rousseau, “that I may see whether he has any thing in him.” Before you can take measure of the capacity of others, you ought to be sure that they have not taken measure of yours. They may think you a spy on them, and may not like their company. If you really want to know whether another person can talk well, begin by saying a good thing yourself, and you will have a right to look for a rejoinder. “The best tennis-players,” says Sir Fopling Flutter, “make the best matches.”

For wit is like a rest
Held up at tennis, which men do the best
With the best players.

We hear it often said of a great author, or a great actress, that they are very stupid people in private. But he was a fool that said so. *Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your manners.* In conversation, as in other things, the action and reaction should bear a certain proportion to each other.—Authors may, in some sense, be looked upon as foreigners, who are not naturalized even in their native soil. L[amb] once came down into the country to see us. He was “like the most capricious poet Ovid among the Goths.” The country people thought him an oddity, and did not understand his jokes. It would be strange if they had ; for he did not

make any, while he stayed. But when we crossed the country to Oxford, then he spoke a little. He and the old colleges were *hail-fellow well met* ; and in the quadrangles, he “walked gowned.”

There is a character of a gentleman ; so there is a character of a scholar, which is no less easily recognised. The one has an air of books about him, as the other has of good-breeding. The one wears his thoughts as the other does his clothes, gracefully ; and even if they are a little old-fashioned, they are not ridiculous : they have had their day. The gentleman shows, by his manner, that he has been used to respect from others : the scholar that he lays claim to self-respect and to a certain independence of opinion. The one has been accustomed to the best company ; the other has passed his time in cultivating an intimacy with the best authors. There is nothing forward or vulgar in the behaviour of the one ; nothing shrewd or petulant in the observations of the other, as if he should astonish the bye-standers, or was astonished himself at his own discoveries. Good taste and good sense, like common politeness, are, or are supposed to be, matters of course. One is distinguished by an appearance of marked attention to every one present ; the other manifests an habitual air of abstraction and absence of mind. The one is not an upstart with all the self-important airs of the founder of his own fortune ; nor the other a self-taught man, with the repulsive self-sufficiency which arises from an ignorance of what hundreds have known before him. We must excuse perhaps a little conscious family-pride in the one, and a little harmless pedantry in the other.—As there is

a class of the first character which sinks into the mere gentleman, that is, which has nothing but this sense of respectability and propriety to support it—so the character of a scholar not unfrequently dwindleth down into the shadow of a shade, till nothing is left of it but the mere book-worm. There is often something amiable as well as enviable in this last character. I know one such instance, at least. The person I mean has an admiration for learning, if he is only dazzled by its light. He lives among old authors, if he does not enter much into their spirit. He handles the covers, and turns over the page, and is familiar with the names and dates. He is busy and self-involved. He hangs like a film and cob-web upon letters, or is like the dust upon the outside of knowledge, which should not be rudely brushed aside. He follows learning as its shadow; but as such, he is respectable. He browzes on the husk and leaves of books, as the young fawn browzes on the bark and leaves of trees. Such a one lives all his life in a dream of learning, and has never once had his sleep broken by a real sense of things. He believes implicitly in genius, truth, virtue, liberty, because he finds the names of these things in books. He thinks that love and friendship are the finest things imaginable, both in practice and theory. The legend of good women is to him no fiction. When he steals from the twilight of his cell, the scene breaks upon him like an illuminated missal, and all the people he sees are but so many figures in a *camera obscura*. He reads the world, like a favourite volume, only to find beauties in it, or like an edition of some old work which he is preparing for the press, only to make emendations in it,

and correct the errors that have inadvertently slipt in. He and his dog Tray are much the same honest, simple-hearted, faithful, affectionate creatures—if Tray could but read ! His mind cannot take the impression of vice : but the gentleness of his nature turns gall to milk. He would not hurt a fly. He draws the picture of mankind from the guileless simplicity of his own heart : and when he dies, his spirit will take its smiling leave, without having ever had an ill thought of others, or the consciousness of one in itself !

The London Magazine, September 1820.

The Plain Speaker, 1826.

ELIA, AND GEOFFREY CRAYON

So Mr. Charles Lamb and Mr. Washington Irving choose to designate themselves ; and as their lucubrations under one or other of these *noms de guerre* have gained considerable notice from the public, we shall here attempt to discriminate their several styles and manner, and to point out the beauties and defects of each in treating of somewhat similar subjects.

Mr. Irving is, we take it, the more popular writer of the two, or a more general favourite : Mr. Lamb has more devoted, and perhaps more judicious partisans. Mr. Irving is by birth an American, and has, as it were, *skimmed the cream*, and taken off patterns with great skill and cleverness, from our best known and happiest writers, so that their thoughts and almost their reputation are indirectly transferred to his page, and smile upon us from another hemisphere, like " the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow " : he succeeds to our admiration and our sympathy by a sort of prescriptive title and traditional privilege. Mr. Lamb, on the contrary, being " native to the manner here," though he too has borrowed from previous sources, instead of availing himself of the most popular and admired, has groped out his way, and made his most successful researches among the more obscure and intricate, though certainly not the least pithy or pleasant of our writers. Mr. Washington

Irving has culled and transplanted the flowers of modern literature, for the amusement of the general reader: Mr. Lamb has raked among the dust and cobwebs of a more remote period, has exhibited specimens of curious relics, and pored over moth-eaten, decayed manuscripts, for the benefit of the more inquisitive and discerning part of the public. Antiquity after a time has the grace of novelty, as old fashions revived are mistaken for new ones; and a certain quaintness and singularity of style is an agreeable relief to the smooth and insipid monotony of modern composition. Mr. Lamb has succeeded not by conforming to the *Spirit of the Age*, but in opposition to it. He does not march boldly along with the crowd, but steals off the pavement to pick his way in the contrary direction. He prefers *bye-ways* to *highways*. When the full tide of human life pours along to some festive show, to some pageant of a day, Elia would stand on one side to look over an old book-stall, or stroll down some deserted pathway in search of a pensive inscription over a tottering doorway, or some quaint device in architecture, illustrative of embryo art and ancient manners. Mr. Lamb has the very soul of an antiquarian, as this implies a reflecting humanity; the film of the past hovers forever before him. He is shy, sensitive, the reverse of every thing coarse, vulgar, obtrusive, and *commonplace*. He would fain "shuffle off this mortal coil," and his spirit clothes itself in the garb of elder time, homelier, but more durable. He is borne along with no pompous paradoxes, shines in no glittering tinsel of a fashionable phraseology; is neither fop nor sophist. He has none of the turbulence or froth of new-fangled

opinions. His style runs pure and clear, though it may often take an underground course, or be conveyed through old-fashioned conduit-pipes. Mr. Lamb does not court popularity, nor strut in gaudy plumes, but shrinks from every kind of ostentatious and obvious pretension into the retirement of his own mind.

“ The self-applauding bird, the peacock see :—
Mark what a sumptuous pharisee is he !
Meridian sun-beams tempt him to unfold
His radiant glories, azure, green, and gold :
He treads as if, some solemn music near,
His measured step were governed by his ear :
And seems to say—“ Ye meaner fowl, give place,
I am all splendour, dignity, and grace ! ”
Not so the pheasant on his charms presumes,
Though he too has a glory in his plumes.
He, Christian-like, retreats with modest mien
To the close copse or far sequestered green,
And shines without desiring to be seen.” }

These lines well describe the modest and delicate beauties of Mr. Lamb’s writings, contrasted with the lofty and vain-glorious pretensions of some of his contemporaries. This gentleman is not one of those who pay all their homage to the prevailing idol: he thinks that

“ New-born gauds are made and moulded of things past,”
nor does he

“ Give to dust that is a little gilt
More laud than gilt o’er-dusted.”

His convictions "do not in broad rumour lie," nor are they "set off to the world in the glistering foil" of fashion; but "live and breathe aloft in those pure eyes, and perfect judgment of all-seeing *time*." Mr. Lamb rather affects and is tenacious of the obscure and remote: of that which rests on its own intrinsic and silent merit; which scorns all alliance, or even the suspicion of owing any thing to noisy clamour, to the glare of circumstances. There is a fine tone of *chiaro-scuro*, a moral perspective in his writings. He delights to dwell on that which is fresh to the eye of memory; he yearns after and covets what soothes the frailty of human nature. That touches him most nearly which is withdrawn to a certain distance, which verges on the borders of oblivion:—that piques and provokes his fancy most, which is hid from a superficial glance. That which, though gone by, is still remembered, is in his view more genuine, and has given more "vital signs that it will live," than a thing of yesterday, that may be forgotten to-morrow. Death has in this sense the spirit of life in it; and the shadowy has to our author something substantial in it. Ideas savour most of reality in his mind; or rather his imagination loiters on the edge of each, and a page of his writings recals to our fancy the *stranger* on the grate, fluttering in its dusky tenuity, with its idle superstition and hospitable welcome!

Mr. Lamb has a distaste to new faces, to new books, to new buildings, to new customs. He is shy of all imposing appearances, of all assumptions of self-importance, of all adventitious ornaments, of all mechanical advantages, even to a nervous excess. It is not merely

that he does not rely upon, or ordinarily avail himself of them ; he holds them in abhorrence, he utterly abjures and discards them, and places a great gulph between him and them. He despairs all the vulgar artifices of authorship, all the cant of criticism, and helps to notoriety. He has no grand swelling theories to attract the visionary and the enthusiast, no passing topics to allure the thoughtless and the vain. He evades the present, he mocks the future. His affections revert to, and settle on the past, but then, even this must have something personal and local in it to interest him deeply and thoroughly ; he pitches his tent in the suburbs of existing manners ; brings down the account of character to the few straggling remains of the last generation ; seldom ventures beyond the bills of mortality, and occupies that nice point between egotism and disinterested humanity. No one makes the tour of our southern metropolis, or describes the manners of the last age, so well as Mr. Lamb—with so fine, and yet so formal an air—with such vivid obscurity, with such arch piquancy, such picturesque quaintness, such smiling pathos. How admirably he has sketched the former inmates of the South-Sea House ; what “ fine fretwork he makes of their double and single entries ! ” With what a firm, yet subtle pencil he has embodied *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist !* How notably he embalms a battered *beau* ; how delightfully an amour, that was cold forty years ago, revives in his pages ! With what well-disguised humour, he introduces us to his relations, and how freely he serves up his friends ! Certainly, some of his portraits are *fixtures*, and will do to hang up as

lasting and lively emblems of human infirmity. Then there is no one who has so sure an ear for "the chimes at midnight," not even excepting Mr. Justice Shallow; nor could Master Silence himself take his "cheese and pippins" with a more significant and satisfactory air. With what a gusto Mr. Lamb describes the inns and courts of law, the Temple and Gray's Inn, as if he had been a student there for the last two hundred years, and had been as well acquainted with the person of Sir Francis Bacon as he is with his portrait or writings! It is hard to say whether St. John's Gate is connected with more intense and authentic associations in his mind, as a part of old London Wall, or as the frontispiece (time out of mind) of the Gentleman's Magazine. He haunts Watling-street like a gentle spirit; the avenues to the play-houses are thick with panting recollections, and Christ's-Hospital still breathes the balmy breath of infancy in his description of it! Whittington and his Cat are a fine hallucination for Mr. Lamb's historic Muse, and we believe he never heartily forgave a certain writer who took the subject of Guy Faux out of his hands. The streets of London are his fairy-land, teeming with wonder, with life and interest to his retrospective glance, as it did to the eager eye of childhood; he has contrived to weave its tritest traditions into a bright and endless romance!

Mr. Lamb's taste in books is also fine, and it is peculiar. It is not the worse for a little *idiosyncrasy*. He does not go deep into the Scotch novels, but he is at home in Smollet or Fielding. He is little read in Junius or Gibbon, but no man can give a better account of Burton's

Anatomy of Melancholy, or Sir Thomas Brown's Urn-Burial, or Fuller's Worthies, or John Bunyan's Holy War. No one is more unimpressible to a specious declamation ; no one relishes a recondite beauty more. His admiration of Shakespear and Milton does not make him despise Pope ; and he can read Parnell with patience, and Gay with delight. His taste in French and German literature is somewhat defective ; nor has he made much progress in the science of Political Economy or other abstruse studies, though he has read vast folios of controversial divinity, merely for the sake of the intricacy of style, and to save himself the pain of thinking. Mr. Lamb is a good judge of prints and pictures. His admiration of Hogarth does credit to both, particularly when it is considered that Leonardo da Vinci is his next greatest favourite, and that his love of the *actual* does not proceed from a want of taste for the *ideal*. His worst fault is an over-eagerness of enthusiasm, which occasionally makes him take a surfeit of his highest favourites.—Mr. Lamb excels in familiar conversation almost as much as in writing, when his modesty does not overpower his self-possession. He is as little of a proser as possible ; but he *blurts* out the finest wit and sense in the world. He keeps a good deal in the background at first, till some excellent conceit pushes him forward, and then he abounds in whim and pleasantry. There is a primitive simplicity and self-denial about his manners ; and a Quakerism in his personal appearance, which is, however, relieved by a fine Titian head, full of dumb eloquence ! Mr. Lamb is a general favourite with those who know him. His character is equally

singular and amiable. He is endeared to his friends not less by his foibles than his virtues ; he insures their esteem by the one, and does not wound their self-love by the other. He gains ground in the opinion of others, by making no advances in his own. We easily admire genius where the diffidence of the possessor makes our acknowledgment of merit seem like a sort of patronage, or act of condescension, as we willingly extend our good offices where they are not exacted as obligations, or repaid with sullen indifference.—The style of the Essays of Elia is liable to the charge of a certain *mannerism*. His sentences are cast in the mould of old authors ; his expressions are borrowed from them ; but his feelings and observations are genuine and original, taken from actual life, or from his own breast ; and he may be said (if any one can) “ to have coined his heart for *jest*s,” and to have split his brain for fine distinctions ! Mr. Lamb, from the peculiarity of his exterior and address as an author, would probably never have made his way by detached and independent efforts ; but, fortunately for himself and others, he has taken advantage of the Periodical Press, where he has been stuck into notice, and the texture of his compositions is assuredly fine enough to bear the broadest glare of popularity that has hitherto shone upon them. Mr. Lamb’s literary efforts have procured him civic honours (a thing unheard of in our times), and he has been invited, in his character of ELIA, to dine at a select party with the Lord Mayor. We should prefer this distinction to that of being poet-laureat. We would recommend to Mr. Waithman’s perusal (if Mr. Lamb has not anticipated us) the *Rosa-*

mond Gray and the *John Woodvil* of the same author, as an agreeable relief to the noise of a City feast, and the heat of City elections. A friend, a short time ago, quoted some lines * from the last-mentioned of these works, which meeting Mr. Godwin's eye, he was so struck with the beauty of the passage, and with a consciousness of having seen it before, that he was uneasy till he could recollect where, and after hunting in vain for it in Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and other not unlikely places, sent to Mr. Lamb to know if he could help him to the author !

Mr. Washington Irvine's acquaintance with English literature begins almost where Mr. Lamb's ends,—with the *Spectator*, Tom Brown's works and the wits of Queen Anne. He is not bottomed in our elder writers, nor do we think that he has tasked his own faculties much, at least on English ground. Of the merit of his *Knickerbocker*, and New York stories, we cannot pretend to judge. But in his *Sketch-book* and *Bracebridge-Hall* he gives us very good American copies of our British Essayists and Novelists, which may be very well on the other side of the water, or as proofs of the capabilities of the national genius, but which might be dispensed with here, where we have to boast of the originals. Not only Mr. Irvine's language is with great taste and felicity modelled on that of Addison, Goldsmith, Sterne, or Mackenzie ; but the thoughts and sentiments are taken at the rebound, and as they are brought forward at the

* The description of sports in the forest :

“ To see the sun to bed and to arise,
Like some hot amourist with glowing eyes,” &c.

present period, want both freshness and probability. Mr. Irvine's writings are literary *anachronisms*. He comes to England for the first time ; and being on the spot, fancies himself in the midst of those characters and manners which he had read of in the *Spectator* and other approved authors, and which were the only idea he had hitherto formed of the parent country. Instead of looking round to see what *we are*, he sets to work to describe us as *we were*—at second hand. He has Parson Adams, or Sir Roger de Coverley in his “ *mind's eye* ” ; and he makes a village curate or a country 'squire in Yorkshire or Hampshire sit to these admired models for their portraits in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Whatever the ingenious author has been most delighted with in the representations of books, he transfers to his port-folio, and swears that he has found it actually existing in the course of his observation and travels through Great Britain. Instead of tracing the changes that have taken place in society since Addison or Fielding wrote, he transcribes their account in a different handwriting, and thus keeps us stationary, at least in our most attractive and praise-worthy qualities of simplicity, honesty, modesty, hospitality, and good-nature. This is a very flattering mode of turning fiction into history, or history into fiction ; and we should scarcely know ourselves again in the softened and altered likeness, but that it bears the date of 1820, and issues from the press in Albemarle-street. This is one way of complimenting our national and Tory prejudices ; and coupled with literal or exaggerated portraits of *Yankee* peculiarities, could hardly fail to please. The first Essay in the *Sketch-*

book, that on national Antipathies, is the best ; but after that, the sterling ore of wit or feeling is gradually spun thinner and thinner, till it fades to the shadow of a shade. Mr. Irvine is himself, we believe, a most agreeable and deserving man, and has been led into the natural and pardonable error we speak of, by the tempting bait of European popularity, in which he thought there was no more likely method of succeeding than by imitating the style of our standard authors, and giving us credit for the virtues of our forefathers.

We should not feel that we had discharged our obligations to truth or friendship, if we were to let this volume go without introducing into it the name of the author of *Virginius*. This is the more proper, inasmuch as he is a character by himself, and the only poet now living that is a mere poet. If we were asked what sort of man Mr. Knowles is, we could only say, "he is the writer of *Virginius*." His most intimate friends see nothing in him, by which they could trace the work to the author. The seeds of dramatic genius are contained and fostered in the warmth of the blood that flows in his veins ; his heart dictates to his head. The most unconscious, the most unpretending, the most artless of mortals, he instinctively obeys the impulses of natural feeling, and produces a perfect work of art. He has hardly read a poem or a play or seen any thing of the world, but he hears the anxious beatings of his own heart, and makes others feel them by the force of sympathy. Ignorant alike of rules, regardless of models, he follows the steps of truth and simplicity ; and strength, proportion, and

delicacy are the infallible results. By thinking of nothing but his subject, he rivets the attention of the audience to it. All his dialogue tends to action, all his situations form classic groups. There is no doubt that Virginius is the best acting tragedy that has been produced on the modern stage. Mr. Knowles himself was a player at one time, and this circumstance has probably enabled him to judge of the picturesque and dramatic effect of his lines, as we think it might have assisted Shakespear. There is no impertinent display, no flaunting poetry ; the writer immediately conceives how a thought would tell if he had to speak it himself. Mr. Knowles is the first tragic writer of the age ; in other respects he is a common man ; and divides his time and his affections between his plots and his fishing-tackle, between the Muses' spring, and those mountain-streams which sparkle like his own eye, that gush out like his own voice at the sight of an old friend. We have known him almost from a child, and we must say he appears to us the same boy-poet that he ever was. He has been cradled in song, and rocked in it as in a dream, forgetful of himself and of the world !

The Spirit of the Age, 1825.

MR. COLERIDGE

THE present is an age of talkers, and not of doers ; and the reason is, that the world is growing old. We are so far advanced in the Arts and Sciences, that we live in retrospect, and doat on past achievements. The accumulation of knowledge has been so great, that we are lost in wonder at the height it has reached, instead of attempting to climb or add to it ; while the variety of objects distracts and dazzles the looker-on. What *niche* remains unoccupied ? What path untried ? What is the use of doing anything, unless we could do better than all those who have gone before us ? What hope is there of this ? We are like those who have been to see some noble monument of art, who are content to admire without thinking of rivalling it ; or like guests after a feast, who praise the hospitality of the donor "and thank the bounteous Pan"—perhaps carrying away some trifling fragments ; or like the spectators of a mighty battle, who still hear its sound afar off, and the clashing of armour and the neighing of the war-horse and the shout of victory is in their ears, like the rushing of innumerable waters !

Mr. Coleridge has "a mind reflecting ages past" ; his voice is like the echo of the congregated roar of the

“ dark rearward and abyss ” of thought. He who has seen a mouldering tower by the side of a chrystral lake, hid by the mist, but glittering in the wave below, may conceive the dim, gleaming, uncertain intelligence of his eye : he who has marked the evening clouds uprolled (a world of vapours), has seen the picture of his mind, unearthly, unsubstantial, with gorgeous tints and ever-varying forms—

“ That which was now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.”

Our author’s mind is (as he himself might express it) *tangential*. There is no subject on which he has not touched, none on which he has rested. With an understanding fertile, subtle, expansive, “ quick, forgetive, apprehensive,” beyond all living precedent, few traces of it will perhaps remain. He lends himself to all impressions alike ; he gives up his mind and liberty of thought to none. He is a general lover of art and science, and wedded to no one in particular. He pursues knowledge as a mistress, with outstretched hands and winged speed ; but as he is about to embrace her, his Daphne turns—alas ! not to a laurel ! Hardly a speculation has been left on record from the earliest time, but it is loosely folded up in Mr. Coleridge’s memory, like a rich, but somewhat tattered piece of tapestry : we might add (with more seeming than real extravagance), that scarce a thought can pass through the mind of man, but its sound has at some time or other passed over his head with

rustling pinions. On whatever question or author you speak, he is prepared to take up the theme with advantage—from Peter Abelard down to Thomas Moore, from the subtlest metaphysics to the politics of the *Courier*. There is no man of genius, in whose praise he descants, but the critic seems to stand above the author, and “what in him is weak, to strengthen, what is low, to raise and support”; nor is there any work of genius that does not come out of his hands like an illuminated Missal, sparkling even in its defects. If Mr. Coleridge had not been the most impressive talker of his age, he would probably have been the finest writer; but he lays down his pen to make sure of an auditor, and mortgages the admiration of posterity for the state of an idler. If he had not been a poet, he would have been a powerful logician; if he had not dipped his wing in the Unitarian controversy, he might have soared to the very summit of fancy. But in writing verse, he is trying to subject the Muse to *transcendental* theories: in his abstract reasoning, he misses his way by strewing it with flowers. All that he has done of moment, he had done twenty years ago: since then, he may be said to have lived on the sound of his own voice. Mr. Coleridge is too rich in intellectual wealth, to need to task himself to any drudgery: he has only to draw the sliders of his imagination, and a thousand subjects expand before him, startling him with their brilliancy, or losing themselves in endless obscurity—

“ And by the force of blear illusion,
They draw him on to his confusion.”

What is the little he could add to the stock, compared with the countless stores that lie about him, that he should stoop to pick up a name, or to polish an idle fancy? He walks abroad in the majesty of an universal understanding, eyeing the “rich strand,” or golden sky above him, and “goes sounding on his way,” in eloquent accents, uncomelled and free!

Persons of the greatest capacity are often those, who for this reason do the least; for surveying themselves from the highest point of view, amidst the infinite variety of the universe, their own share in it seems trifling, and scarce worth a thought, and they prefer the contemplation of all that is, or has been, or can be, to the making a coil about doing what, when done, is no better than vanity. It is hard to concentrate all our attention and efforts on one pursuit, except from ignorance of others; and without this concentration of our faculties, no great progress can be made in any one thing. It is not merely that the mind is not capable of the effort; it does not think the effort worth making. Action is one; but thought is manifold. He whose restless eye glances through the wide compass of nature and art, will not consent to have “his own nothings monstered”; but he must do this, before he can give his whole soul to them. The mind, after “letting contemplation have its fill,” or

“Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air,”

sinks down on the ground, breathless, exhausted, powerless, inactive; or if it must have some vent to its feelings,

seeks the most easy and obvious ; is soothed by friendly flattery, lulled by the murmur of immediate applause, thinks as it were aloud, and babbles in its dreams ! A scholar (so to speak) is a more disinterested and abstracted character than a mere author. The first looks at the numberless volumes of a library, and says, " All these are mine " : the other points to a single volume (perhaps it may be an immortal one) and says, " My name is written on the back of it." This is a puny and grovelling ambition, beneath the lofty amplitude of Mr. Coleridge's mind. No, he revolves in his wayward soul, or utters to the passing wind, or discourses to his own shadow, things mightier and more various !—Let us draw the curtain, and unlock the shrine.

Learning rocked him in his cradle, and while yet a child,

" He lisped in numbers, for the numbers came."

At sixteen he wrote his *Ode on Chatterton*, and he still reverts to that period with delight, not so much as it relates to himself (for that string of his own early promise of fame rather jars than otherwise) but as exemplifying the youth of a poet. Mr. Coleridge talks of himself, without being an egotist, for in him the individual is always merged in the abstract and general. He distinguished himself at school and at the University by his knowledge of the classics, and gained several prizes for Greek epigrams. How many men are there (great scholars, celebrated names in literature) who having done the same thing in their youth, have no

other idea all the rest of their lives but of this achievement, of a fellowship and dinner, and who, installed in academic honours, would look down on our author as a mere strolling bard ! At Christ's Hospital, where he was brought up, he was the idol of those among his schoolfellows, who mingled with their bookish studies the music of thought and of humanity ; and he was usually attended round the cloisters by a group of these (inspiring and inspired) whose hearts, even then, burnt within them as he talked, and where the sounds yet linger to mock ELIA on his way, still turning pensive to the past ! One of the finest and rarest parts of Mr. Coleridge's conversation, is when he expatiates on the Greek tragedians (not that he is not well acquainted, when he pleases, with the epic poets, or the philosophers, or orators, or historians of antiquity)—on the subtle reasonings and melting pathos of Euripides, on the harmonious gracefulness of Sophocles, tuning his love-laboured song, like sweetest warblings from a sacred grove ; on the high-wrought trumpet-tongued eloquence of Æschylus, whose Prometheus, above all, is like an Ode to Fate, and a pleading with Providence, his thoughts being let loose as his body is chained on his solitary rock, and his afflicted will (the emblem of mortality)

“ Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.”

As the impassioned critic speaks and rises in his theme, you would think you heard the voice of the Man hated by the Gods, contending with the wild winds as they roar, and his eye glitters with the spirit of Antiquity !

Next, he was engaged with Hartley's tribes of mind, "ethereal braid, thought-woven,"—and he busied himself for a year or two with vibrations and vibratiuncles and the great law of association that binds all things in its mystic chain, and the doctrine of Necessity (the mild teacher of Charity) and the Millennium, anticipative of a life to come—and he plunged deep into the controversy on Matter and Spirit, and, as an escape from Dr. Priestley's Materialism, where he felt himself imprisoned by the logician's spell, like Ariel in the cloven pine-tree, he became suddenly enamoured of Bishop Berkeley's fairy-world,* and used in all companies to build the universe, like a brave poetical fiction, of fine words—and he was deep-read in Malebranche, and in Cudworth's Intellectual System (a huge pile of learning, unwieldy, enormous) and in Lord Brook's hieroglyphic theories, and in Bishop Butler's Sermons, and in the Duchess of Newcastle's fantastic folios, and in Clarke and South and Tillotson, and all the fine thinkers and masculine reasoners of that age—and Leibnitz's *Pre-Established Harmony* reared its arch above his head, like the rainbow in the cloud, covenanting with the hopes of man—and then he fell plump, ten thousand fathoms down (but his wings saved him harmless) into the *hortus siccus*

* Mr. Coleridge named his eldest son (the writer of some beautiful Sonnets) after Hartley, and the second after Berkeley. The third was called Derwent, after the river of that name. Nothing can be more characteristic of his mind than this circumstance. All his ideas indeed are like a river, flowing on for ever, and still murmuring as it flows, discharging its waters and still replenished—

" And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean ! "

of Dissent, where he pared religion down to the standard of reason, and stripped faith of mystery, and preached Christ crucified and the Unity of the Godhead, and so dwelt for a while in the spirit with John Huss and Jerome of Prague and Socinus and old John Zisca, and ran through Neal's History of the Puritan's, and Calamy's Non-Conformists' Memorial, having like thoughts and passions with them—but then Spinoza became his God, and he took up the vast chain of being in his hand, and the round world became the centre and the soul of all things in some shadowy sense, forlorn of meaning, and around him he beheld the living traces and the sky-pointing proportions of the mighty Pan—but poetry redeemed him from this spectral philosophy, and he bathed his heart in beauty, and gazed at the golden light of heaven, and drank of the spirit of the universe, and wandered at eve by fairy-stream or fountain,

“ —When he saw naught but beauty,
When he heard the voice of that Almighty One
In every breeze that blew, or wave that murmured”—

and wedded with truth in Plato's shade, and in the writings of Proclus and Plotinus saw the ideas of things in the eternal mind, and unfolded all mysteries with the Schoolmen and fathomed the depths of Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas, and entered the third heaven with Jacob Behmen, and walked hand in hand with Swedenborg through the pavilions of the New Jerusalem, and sung his faith in the promise and in the word in his *Religious Musings*—and lowering himself from that dizzy

height, poised himself on Milton's wings, and spread out his thoughts in charity with the glad prose of Jeremy Taylor, and wept over Bowles's Sonnets, and studied Cowper's blank verse, and betook himself to Thomson's Castle of Indolence, and sported with the wits of Charles the Second's days and of Queen Anne, and relished Swift's style and that of the John Bull (Arbuthnot's we mean, not Mr. Croker's), and dallied with the British Essayists and Novelists, and knew all qualities of more modern writers with a learned spirit, Johnson, and Goldsmith, and Junius, and Burke, and Godwin, and the Sorrows of Werter, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire, and Marivaux, and Crebillon, and thousands more—now “laughed with Rabelais in his easy-chair” or pointed to Hogarth, or afterwards dwelt on Claude's classic scenes, or spoke with rapture of Raphael, and compared the women at Rome to figures that had walked out of his pictures, or visited the Oratory of Pisa, and described the works of Giotto and Ghirlandaio and Massaccio, and gave the moral of the picture of the Triumph of Death, where the beggars and the wretched invoke his dreadful dart, but the rich and mighty of the earth quail and shrink before it ; and in that land of siren sights and sounds, saw a dance of peasant girls, and was charmed with lutes and gondolas,—or wandered into Germany and lost himself in the labyrinths of the Hartz Forest and of the Kantean philosophy, and amongst the cabalistic names of Fichte and Schelling and Lessing, and God knows who—this was long after, but all the former while, he had nerved his heart and filled his eyes with tears, as he hailed the rising

orb of liberty, since quenched in darkness and in blood, and had kindled his affections at the blaze of the French Revolution, and sang for joy when the towers of the Bastile and the proud places of the insolent and the oppressor fell, and would have floated his bark, freighted with fondest fancies, across the Atlantic wave with Southey and others to seek for peace and freedom—

“ In Philarmonia’s undivided dale ! ”

Alas ! “ *Frailty, thy name is Genius !* ”—What is become of all this mighty heap of hope, of thought, or learning, and humanity ? It has ended in swallowing doses of oblivion and in writing paragraphs in the *Courier*.—Such and so little is the mind of man !

It was not to be supposed that Mr. Coleridge could keep on at the rate he set off ; he could not realise all he knew or thought, and less could not fix his desultory ambition ; other stimulants supplied the place, and kept up the intoxicating dream, the fever and the madness of his early impressions. Liberty (the philosopher’s and the poet’s bride) had fallen a victim, meanwhile, to the murderous practices of the hag, Legitimacy. Proscribed by court-hirelings, too romantic for the herd of vulgar politicians, our enthusiast stood at bay, and at last turned on the pivot of a subtle casuistry to the *unclean side* : but his discursive reason would not let him trammeled himself into a poet-laureate or stamp-distributor, and he stopped, ere he had quite passed that well-known “ bourne from whence no traveller returns ”—and so has sunk into torpid, uneasy repose, tantalised by useless resources, haunted by vain imaginings, his lips idly

moving, but his heart for ever still, or, as the shattered chords vibrate of themselves, making melancholy music to the ear of memory ! Such is the fate of genius in an age, when in the unequal contest with sovereign wrong, every man is ground to powder who is not either a born slave, or who does not willingly and at once offer up the yearnings of humanity and the dictates of reason as a welcome sacrifice to besotted prejudice and loathsome power.

Of all Mr. Coleridge's productions, the *Ancient Mariner* is the only one that we could with confidence put into any person's hands, on whom we wished to impress a favourable idea of his extraordinary powers. Let whatever other objections be made to it, it is unquestionably a work of genius—of wild, irregular, overwhelming imagination, and has that rich, varied movement in the verse, which gives a distant idea of the lofty or changeful tones of Mr. Coleridge's voice. In the *Christabel*, there is one splendid passage on divided friendship. The *Translation of Schiller's Wallenstein* is also a masterly production in its kind, faithful and spirited. Among his smaller pieces there are occasional bursts of pathos and fancy, equal to what we might expect from him ; but these form the exception, and not the rule. Such, for instance, is his affecting Sonnet to the author of the *Robbers*.

“ Schiller ! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—

That in no after-moment aught less vast
Might stamp me mortal ! A triumphant shout
Black horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd.
Ah ! Bard tremendous in sublimity !
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood !
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstasy."

His Tragedy, entitled *Remorse*, is full of beautiful and striking passages, but it does not place the author in the first rank of dramatic writers. But if Mr. Coleridge's works do not place him in that rank, they injure instead of conveying a just idea of the man, for he himself is certainly in the first class of general intellect.

If our author's poetry is inferior to his conversation, his prose is utterly abortive. Hardly a gleam is to be found in it of the brilliancy and richness of those stores of thought and language that he pours out incessantly, when they are lost like drops of water in the ground. The principal work, in which he has attempted to embody his general views of things, is the *FRIEND*, of which, though it contains some noble passages and fine trains of thought, prolixity and obscurity are the most frequent characteristics.

No two persons can be conceived more opposite in character or genius than the subject of the present and of the preceding sketch.* Mr. Godwin, with less

* This dealt with Mr. William Godwin.—S.W.

natural capacity, and with fewer acquired advantages, by concentrating his mind on some given object, and doing what he had to do with all his might, has accomplished much, and will leave more than one monument of a powerful intellect behind him ; Mr. Coleridge, by dissipating his, and dallying with every subject by turns, has done little or nothing to justify to the world or to posterity, the high opinion which all who have ever heard him converse, or known him intimately, with one accord entertain of him. Mr. Godwin's faculties have kept at home, and plied their task in the workshop of the brain, diligently and effectually : Mr. Coleridge's have gossiped away their time, and gadded about from house to house, as if life's business were to melt the hours in listless talk. Mr. Godwin is intent on a subject, only as it concerns himself and his reputation ; he works it out as a matter of duty, and discards from his mind whatever does not forward his main object as impertinent and vain. Mr. Coleridge, on the other hand, delights in nothing but episodes and digressions, neglects whatever he undertakes to perform, and can act only on spontaneous impulses, without object or method. "He cannot be constrained by mastery." While he should be occupied with a given pursuit, he is thinking of a thousand other things ; a thousand tastes, a thousand objects tempt him, and distract his mind, which keeps open house, and entertains all comers ; and after being fatigued and amused with morning calls from idle visitors, finds the day consumed and its business un-concluded. Mr. Godwin, on the contrary, is somewhat exclusive and unsocial in his habits of mind, entertains

no company but what he gives his whole time and attention to, and wisely writes over the doors of his understanding, his fancy, and his senses—"No admittance except on business." He has none of that fastidious refinement and false delicacy, which might lead him to balance between the endless variety of modern attainments. He does not throw away his life (nor a single half-hour of it) in adjusting the claims of different accomplishments, and in choosing between them or making himself master of them all. He sets about his task (whatever it may be), and goes through it with spirit and fortitude. He has the happiness to think an author the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest author in it. Mr. Coleridge, in writing an harmonious stanza, would stop to consider whether there was not more grace and beauty in a *Pas de trois*, and would not proceed till he had resolved this question by a chain of metaphysical reasoning without end. Not so Mr. Godwin. That is best to him, which he can do best. He does not waste himself in vain aspirations and effeminate sympathies. He is blind, deaf, insensible to all but the trump of Fame. Plays, operas, painting, music, ball-rooms, wealth, fashion, titles, lords, ladies, touch him not—all these are no more to him than to the magician in his cell, and he writes on to the end of the chapter, through good report and evil report. *Pingo in eternitatem*—is his motto. He neither envies nor admires what others are, but is contented to be what he is, and strives to do the utmost he can. Mr. Coleridge has flirted with the Muses as with a set of mistresses: Mr. Godwin has been married twice, to Reason and to

Fancy, and has to boast no short-lived progeny by each. So to speak, he has *valves* belonging to his mind, to regulate the quantity of gas admitted into it, so that like the bare, unsightly, but well-compacted steam-vessel, it cuts its liquid way, and arrives at its promised end : while Mr. Coleridge's bark, " taught with the little nautilus to sail," the sport of every breath, dancing to every wave,

" Youth at its prow, and Pleasure at its helm,"

flutters its gaudy pennons in the air, glitters in the sun, but we wait in vain to hear of its arrival in the destined harbour. Mr. Godwin, with less variety and vividness, with less subtlety and susceptibility both of thought and feeling, has had firmer nerves, a more determined purpose, a more comprehensive grasp of his subject, and the results are as we find them. Each has met with his reward : for justice has, after all, been done to the pretensions of each ; and we must, in all cases, use means to ends !

It was a misfortune to any man of talent to be born in the latter end of the last century. Genius stopped the way of Legitimacy, and therefore it was to be abated, crushed, or set aside as a nuisance. The spirit of the monarchy was at variance with the spirit of the age. The flame of liberty, the light of intellect, was to be extinguished with the sword—or with slander, whose edge is sharper than the sword. The war between power and reason was carried on by the first of these abroad—by the last at home. No quarter was given (then or now)

by the Government-critics, the authorised censors of the press, to those who followed the dictates of independence, who listened to the voice of the tempter, Fancy. Instead of gathering fruits and flowers, immortal fruits and amaranthine flowers, they soon found themselves beset not only by a host of prejudices, but assailed with all the engines of power, by nicknames, by lies, by all the arts of malice, interest and hypocrisy, without the possibility of their defending themselves “from the pelting of the pitiless storm,” that poured down upon them from the strongholds of corruption and authority. The philosophers, the dry abstract reasoners, submitted to this reverse pretty well, and armed themselves with patience “as with triple steel,” to bear discomfiture, persecution, and disgrace. But the poets, the creatures of sympathy, could not stand the frowns both of king and people. They did not like to be shut out when places and pensions, when the critic’s praises, and the laurel-wreath were about to be distributed. They did not stomach being *sent to Coventry*, and Mr. Coleridge sounded a retreat for them by the help of casuistry, and a musical voice.—“His words were hollow, but they pleased the ear” of his friends of the Lake School, who turned back disgusted and panic-stricken from the dry desert of unpopularity, like Hassan the camel-driver,

“ And curs’d the hour, and curs’d the luckless day,
When first from Shiraz’ walls they bent their way.”

They are safely enclosed there, but Mr. Coleridge did not enter with them; pitching his tent upon the barren

waste without, and having no abiding place nor city of refuge !

The Spirit of the Age, 1825.
Lectures on the English Poets, 1818.

It remains that I should say a few words of Mr. Coleridge ; and there is no one who has a better right to say what he thinks of him than I have. “ Is there here any dear friend of Cæsar ? To him I say, that Brutus’s love to Cæsar was no less than his.” But no matter.—His Ancient Mariner is his most remarkable performance, and the only one that I could point out to any one as giving an adequate idea of his great natural powers. It is high German, however, and in it he seems to “ conceive of poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless, of past, present, and to come.” His tragedies (for he has written two) are not answerable to it ; they are, except a few poetical passages, drawling sentiment and metaphysical jargon. He has no genuine dramatic talent. There is one fine passage in his Christabel, that which contains the description of the quarrel between Sir Leoline and Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine, who had been friends in youth.

“ Alas ! they had been friends in youth,
But whispering tongues can poison truth ;
And constancy lives in realms above ;
And life is thorny ; and youth is vain ;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain :

And thus it chanc'd as I divine,
 With Roland and Sir Leoline.
 Each spake words of high disdain
 And insult to his heart's best brother,
 And parted ne'er to meet again !
 But neither ever found another
 To free the hollow heart from paining—

They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
 Like cliffs which had been rent asunder :
 A dreary sea now flows between,
 But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
 Shall wholly do away I ween
 The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline a moment's space
 Stood gazing on the damsel's face ;
 And the youthful lord of Tryermaine
 Came back : upon his heart again."

It might seem insidious if I were to praise his ode entitled *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*, as an effusion of high poetical enthusiasm, and strong political feeling. His Sonnet to Schiller conveys a fine compliment to the author of the *Robbers*, and an equally fine idea of the state of youthful enthusiasm in which he composed it.

“ Schiller ! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
 If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
 From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
 That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—

That in no after moment aught less vast
Might stamp me mortal ! A triumphant shout
Black Horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd.

Ah ! Bard tremendous in sublimity !
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood !
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstasy ! "—

His *Conciones ad Populum*, Watchman, &c. are dreary trash. Of his Friend, I have spoken the truth elsewhere. But I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt any thing. There is only one thing he could learn from me in return, but *that* he has not. He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever ; and you wished him to talk on for ever : His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort ; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings ; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and

descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! . . . That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.

Lectures on the English Poets, 1818.

CHARACTER OF COBBETT

PEOPLE have about as substantial an idea of Cobbett as they have of Cribb. His blows are as hard, and he himself is as impenetrable. One has no notion of him as making use of a fine pen, but a great mutton-fist ; his style stuns his readers, and he “ fillips the ear of the public with a three-man beetle.” He is too much for any single newspaper antagonist ; “ lays waste ” a city orator or Member of Parliament, and bears hard upon the government itself. He is a kind of *fourth estate* in the politics of the country. He is not only unquestionably the most powerful political writer of the present day, but one of the best writers in the language. He speaks and thinks plain, broad, downright English. He might be said to have the clearness of Swift, the naturalness of Defoe, and the picturesque satirical description of Mandeville ; if all such comparisons were not impertinent. A really great and original writer is like nobody but himself. In one sense, Sterne was not a wit, nor Shakespeare a poet. It is easy to describe second-rate talents, because they fall into a class, and enlist under a standard : but first rate powers defy calculation or comparison, and can be defined only by themselves. They are *sui generis*, and make the class to which they belong. I have tried

half a dozen times to describe Burke's style without ever succeeding ;—its severe extravagance ; its literal boldness ; its matter-of-fact hyperboles ; its running away with a subject, and from it at the same time—but there is no making it out, for there is no example of the same thing any where else. We have no common measure to refer to ; and his qualities contradict even themselves.

Cobbett is not so difficult. He has been compared to Paine ; and so far it is true there are no two writers who come more into *juxta-position* from the nature of their subjects, from the internal resources on which they draw, and from the popular effect of their writings, and their adaptation (though that is a bad word in the present case) to the capacity of every reader. But still if we turn to a volume of Paine's (his *Common Sense* or *Rights of Man*), we are struck (not to say somewhat refreshed) by the difference. Paine is a much more sententious writer than Cobbett. You cannot open a page in any of his best and earlier works without meeting with some maxim, some antithetical and memorable saying, which is a sort of starting-place for the argument, and the goal to which it returns. There is not a single *bon-mot*, a single sentence in Cobbett that has ever been quoted again. If any thing is ever quoted from him, it is an epithet of abuse or a nickname. He is an excellent hand at invention in that way, and has “*damnable iteration in him.*” What could be better than his pestering Erskine year after year with his second title of *Baron Clackmannan* ? He is rather too fond of *the Sons and Daughters of Corruption*. Paine affected to reduce things to first principles, to announce

self-evident truths. Cobbett troubles himself about little but the details and local circumstances. The first appeared to have made up his mind beforehand to certain opinions, and to try to find the most compendious and pointed expressions for them: his successor appears to have no clue, no fixed or leading principles, nor ever to have thought on a question till he sits down to write about it; but then there seems no end of his matters of fact and raw materials, which are brought out in all their strength and sharpness from not having been squared or frittered down or vamped up to suit a theory—he goes on with his descriptions and illustrations as if he would never come to a stop; they have all the force of novelty with all the familiarity of old acquaintance; his knowledge grows out of the subject, and his style is that of a man who has an absolute intuition of what he is talking about, and never thinks of any thing else. He deals in premises and speaks to evidence—the coming to a conclusion and summing up (which was Paine's *forte*) lies in a smaller compass. The one could not compose an elementary treatise on politics to become a manual for the popular reader; nor could the other in all probability have kept up a weekly journal for the same number of years with the same spirit, interest, and untired perseverance. Paine's writings are a sort of introduction to political arithmetic on a new plan: Cobbett keeps a day-book and makes an entry at full of all the occurrences and troublesome questions that start up throughout the year. Cobbett, with vast industry, vast information, and the utmost power of making what he says intelligible, never seems to get at the beginning or come to the end

of any question : Paine, in a few short sentences, seems by his peremptory manner “ to clear it from all controversy, past, present, and to come.” Paine takes a bird’s-eye view of things. Cobbett sticks close to them, inspects the component parts, and keeps fast hold of the smallest advantages they afford him. Or, if I might here be indulged in a pastoral allusion, Paine tries to enclose his ideas in a fold for security and repose : Cobbett lets *his* pour out upon the plain like a flock of sheep to feed and batten. Cobbett is a pleasanter writer for those to read who do not agree with him ; for he is less dogmatical, goes more into the common grounds of fact and argument to which all appeal, is more desultory and various, and appears less to be driving at a previous conclusion than urged on by the force of present conviction. He is therefore tolerated by all parties, though he has made himself by turns obnoxious to all ; and even those he abuses read him. The Reformers read him when he was a Tory, and the Tories read him now that he is a Reformer. He must, I think, however, be *caviare* to the Whigs.*

If he is less metaphysical and poetical than his celebrated prototype, he is more picturesque and dramatic. His episodes, which are numerous as they are pertinent, are striking, interesting, full of life and *naïveté*, minute, double measure running over, but never tedious—*nunquam sufflaminandus erat*. He is one of those writers who can never tire us, not even of himself ; and the

* The late Lord Thurlow used to say that Cobbett was the only writer that deserved the name of a political reasoner.

reason is, he is always “full of matter.” He never runs to lees, never gives us the vapid leavings of himself, is never “weary, stale, and unprofitable,” but always setting out afresh on his journey, clearing away some old nuisance, and turning up new mould. His egotism is delightful, for there is no affectation in it. He does not talk of himself for lack of something to write about, but because some circumstance that has happened to himself is the best possible illustration of the subject, and he is not the man to shrink from giving the best possible illustration of the subject from a squeamish delicacy. He likes both himself and his subject too well. He does not put himself before it, and say—“admire me first”—but places us in the same situation with himself, and makes us see all that he does. There is no blindman’s-buff, no conscious hints, no awkward ventriloquism, no testimonies of applause, no abstract, senseless self-complacency, no smuggled admiration of his own person by proxy: it is all plain and above-board. He writes himself plain William Cobbett, strips himself quite as naked as any body would wish—in a word, his egotism is full of individuality, and has room for very little vanity in it. We feel delighted, rub our hands, and draw our chair to the fire, when we come to a passage of this sort: we know it will be something new and good, manly and simple, not the same insipid story of self over again. We sit down at table with the writer, but it is to a course of rich viands, flesh, fish, and wild-fowl, and not to a nominal entertainment, like that given by the Barmecide in the Arabian Nights, who put off his visitors with calling for a number of exquisite

things that never appeared, and with the honour of his company. Mr. Cobbett is not a *make-believe* writer. His worst enemy cannot say that of him. Still less is he a vulgar one. He must be a puny, common-place critic indeed, who thinks him so. How fine were the graphical descriptions he sent us from America: what a transatlantic flavour, what a native *gusto*, what a fine *sauce-piquante* of contempt they were seasoned with! If he had sat down to look at himself in the glass, instead of looking about him like Adam in Paradise, he would not have got up these articles in so capital a style. What a noble account of his first breakfast after his arrival in America! It might serve for a month. There is no scene on the stage more amusing. How well he paints the gold and scarlet plumage of the American birds, only to lament more pathetically the want of the wild wood-notes of his native land! The groves of the Ohio that had just fallen beneath the axe's stroke "live in his description," and the turnips that he transplanted from Botley "look green" in prose! How well at another time he describes the poor sheep that had got the tick, and had tumbled down in the agonies of death! It is a portrait in the manner of Bewick, with the strength, the simplicity, and feeling of that great naturalist. What havoc he makes, when he pleases, of the curls of Dr. Parr's wig and of the Whig consistency of Mr. ——! His Grammar too is as entertaining as a story-book. He is too hard upon the style of others, and not enough (sometimes) on his own.

As a political partisan, no one can stand against him. With his brandished club, like Giant Despair in the

Pilgrim's Progress, he knocks out their brains ; and not only no individual, but no corrupt system could hold out against his powerful and repeated attacks, but with the same weapon, swung round like a flail, that he levels his antagonists, he lays his friends low, and puts his own party *hors de combat*. This is a bad propensity, and a worse principle in political tactics, though a common one. If his blows were straight forward and steadily directed to the same object, no unpopular Minister could live before him ; instead of which he lays about right and left, impartially and remorselessly, makes a clear stage, has all the ring to himself, and then runs out of it, just when he should stand his ground. He throws his head into his adversary's stomach, and takes away from him all inclination for the fight, hits fair or foul, strikes at every thing, and as you come up to his aid or stand ready to pursue his advantage, trips up your heels or lays you sprawling, and pummels you when down as much to his heart's content as ever the Yanguesian carriers belaboured Rosinante with their pack-staves. "*He has the back-trick simply the best of any man in Illyria.*" He pays off both scores of old friendship and new-acquired enmity in a breath, in one perpetual volley, one raking fire of "arrowy sleet" shot from his pen. However his own reputation or the cause may suffer in consequence, he cares not one pin about that, so that he disables all who oppose, or who pretend to help him. In fact, he cannot bear success of any kind, not even of his own views or party ; and if any principle were likely to become popular, would turn round against it to shew his power in shouldering it on one side. In

short, wherever power is, there is he against it: he naturally butts at all obstacles, as unicorns are attracted to oak-trees, and feels his own strength only by resistance to the opinions and wishes of the rest of the world. To sail with the stream, to agree with the company, is not his humour. If he could bring about a Reform in Parliament, the odds are that he would instantly fall foul of and try to mar his own handy-work; and he quarrels with his own creatures as soon as he has written them into a little vogue—and a prison. I do not think this is vanity or fickleness so much as a pugnacious disposition, that must have an antagonist power to contend with, and only finds itself at ease in systematic opposition. If it were not for this, the high towers and rotten places of the world would fall before the battering-ram of his hard-headed reasoning: but if he once found them tottering, he would apply his strength to prop them up, and disappoint the expectations of his followers. He cannot agree to any thing established, nor to set up any thing else in its stead. While it is established, he presses hard against it, because it presses upon him, at least in imagination. Let it crumble under his grasp, and the motive to resistance is gone. He then requires some other grievance to set his face against. His principle is repulsion, his nature contradiction: he is made up of mere antipathies, an Ishmaelite indeed without a fellow. He is always playing at *hunt-the-slipper* in politics. He turns round upon whoever is next him. The way to wean him from any opinion, and make him conceive an intolerable hatred against it, would be to place somebody near him who was perpetually dinning it in his

ears. When he is in England, he does nothing but abuse the Boroughmongers, and laugh at the whole system : when he is in America, he grows impatient of freedom and a republic. If he had staid there a little longer, he would have become a loyal and a loving subject of his Majesty King George IV. He lampooned the French Revolution when it was hailed as the dawn of liberty by millions : by the time it was brought into almost universal ill-odour by some means or other (partly no doubt by himself) he had turned, with one or two or three others, staunch Buonapartist. He is always of the militant, not of the triumphant party : so far he bears a gallant shew of magnanimity ; but his gallantry is hardly of the right stamp. It wants principle : for though he is not servile or mercenary, he is the victim of self-will. He must pull down and pull in pieces : it is not his disposition to do otherwise. It is a pity ; for with his great talents he might do great things, if he would go right forward to any useful object, make thorough-stitch work of any question, or join hand and heart with any principle. He changes his opinions as he does his friends, and much on the same account. He has no comfort in fixed principles : as soon as any thing is settled in his own mind, he quarrels with it. He has no satisfaction but in the chase after truth, runs a question down, worries and kills it, then quits it like vermin, and starts some new game, to lead him a new dance, and give him a fresh breathing through bog and brake, with the rabble yelping at his heels, and the leaders perpetually at fault. This he calls sport-royal. He thinks it as good as cudgel-playing or single-stick, or

any thing else that has life in it. He likes the cut and thrust, the falls, bruises, and dry blows of an argument : as to any good or useful results that may come of the amicable settling of it, any one is welcome to them for him. The amusement is over, when the matter is once fairly decided.

There is another point of view in which this may be put. I might say that Mr. Cobbett is a very honest man with a total want of principle, and I might explain this paradox thus. I mean that he is, I think, in downright earnest in what he says, in the part he takes at the time ; but in taking that part, he is led entirely by headstrong obstinacy, caprice, novelty, pique or personal motive of some sort, and not by a stedfast regard for truth, or habitual anxiety for what is right uppermost in his mind. He is not a feed, time-serving, shuffling advocate (no man could write as he does who did not believe himself sincere)—but his understanding is the dupe and slave of his momentary, violent, and irritable humours. He does not adopt an opinion “deliberately or for money” ; yet his conscience is at the mercy of the first provocation he receives, of the first whim he takes in his head ; he sees things through the medium of heat and passion, not with reference to any general principles, and his whole system of thinking is deranged by the first object that strikes his fancy or sours his temper.—One cause of this phenomenon is perhaps his want of a regular education. He is a self-taught man, and has the faults as well as excellences of that class of persons in their most striking and glaring excess. It must be acknowledged that the Editor of the Political Register (the *two-penny*

trash, as it was called, till a bill passed the House to raise the price to sixpence) is not “the gentleman and scholar”: though he has qualities that, with a little better management, would be worth (to the public) both those titles. For want of knowing what has been discovered before him, he has not certain general landmarks to refer to, or a general standard of thought to apply to individual cases. He relies on his own acuteness and the immediate evidence, without being acquainted with the comparative anatomy or philosophical structure of opinion. He does not view things on a large scale or at the horizon (dim and airy enough perhaps)—but as they affect himself, close, palpable, tangible. Whatever he finds out, is his own, and he only knows what he finds out. He is in the constant hurry and fever of gestation: his brain teems incessantly with some fresh project. Every new light is the birth of a new system, the dawn of a new world to him. He is continually outstripping and overreaching himself. The last opinion is the only true one. He is wiser to-day than he was yesterday. Why should he not be wiser to-morrow than he was to-day?—Men of a learned education are not so sharp-witted as clever men without it: but they know the balance of the human intellect better; if they are more stupid, they are more steady; and are less liable to be led astray by their own sagacity and the over-weaning petulance of hard-earned and late-acquired wisdom. They do not fall in love with every meretricious extravagance at first sight, or mistake an old battered hypothesis for a vestal, because they are new to the ways of this old world. They do not seize upon it as a prize, but are safe from gross

imposition by being as wise and no wiser than those who went before them.

Paine said on some occasion—" What I have written, I have written"—as rendering any farther declaration of his principles unnecessary. Not so Mr. Cobbett. What he has written is no rule to him what he is to write. He learns something every day, and every week he takes the field to maintain the opinions of the last six days against friend or foe. I doubt whether this outrageous inconsistency, this headstrong fickleness, this understood want of all rule and method, does not enable him to go on with the spirit, vigour, and variety that he does. He is not pledged to repeat himself. Every new Register is a kind of new Prospectus. He blesses himself from all ties and shackles on his understanding; he has no mortgages on his brain; his notions are free and unencumbered. If he was put in trammels, he might become a vile hack like so many more. But he gives himself " ample scope and verge enough." He takes both sides of a question, and maintains one as sturdily as the other. If nobody else can argue against him, he is a very good match for himself. He writes better in favour of Reform than any body else; he used to write better against it. Wherever he is, there is the tug of war, the weight of the argument, the strength of abuse. He is not like a man in danger of being *bed-rid* in his faculties—He tosses and tumbles about his unwieldy bulk, and when he is tired of lying on one side, relieves himself by turning on the other. His shifting his point of view from time to time not merely adds variety and greater compass to his topics (so that the Political Register is an armoury and maga-

zine for all the materials and weapons of political warfare), but it gives a greater zest and liveliness to his manner of treating them. Mr. Cobbett takes nothing for granted as what he has proved before ; he does not write a book of reference. We see his ideas in their first concoction, fermenting and overflowing with the ebullitions of a lively conception. We look on at the actual process, and are put in immediate possession of the grounds and materials on which he forms his sanguine, unsettled conclusions. He does not give us samples of reasoning, but the whole solid mass, refuse and all.

—“ He pours out all as plain
As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne.”

This is one cause of the clearness and force of his writings. An argument does not stop to stagnate and muddle in his brain, but passes at once to his paper. His ideas are served up, like pancakes, hot and hot. Fresh theories give him fresh courage. He is like a young and lusty bridegroom that divorces a favourite speculation every morning, and marries a new one every night. He is not wedded to his notions, not he. He has not one Mrs. Cobbett among all his opinions. He makes the most of the last thought that has come in his way, seizes fast hold of it, rumples it about in all directions with rough strong hands, has his wicked will of it, takes a surfeit, and throws it away.—Our author’s changing his opinions for new ones is not so wonderful : what is more remarkable is his facility in forgetting his old ones. He does not pretend to consistency (like Mr. Coleridge) ; he

frankly disavows all connexion with himself. He feels no personal responsibility in this way, and cuts a friend or principle with the same decided indifference that Antipholis of Ephesus cuts Ægeon of Syracuse. It is a hollow thing. The only time he ever grew romantic was in bringing over the relics of Mr. Thomas Paine with him from America to go a progress with them through the disaffected districts. Scarce had he landed in Liverpool when he left the bones of a great man to shift for themselves ; and no sooner did he arrive in London than he made a speech to disclaim all participation in the political and theological sentiments of his late idol, and to place the whole stock of his admiration and enthusiasm towards him to the account of his financial speculations, and of his having predicted the fate of paper-money. If he had erected a little gold statue to him, it might have proved the sincerity of this assertion : but to make a martyr and a patron-saint of a man, and to dig up " his canonised bones " in order to expose them as objects of devotion to the rabble's gaze, asks something that has more life and spirit in it, more mind and vivifying soul, than has to do with any calculation of pounds, shillings, and pence ! The fact is, he *ratted* from his own project. He found the thing not so ripe as he had expected. His heart failed him : his enthusiasm fled, and he made his retraction. His admiration is short-lived : his contempt only is rooted, and his resentment lasting. The above was only one instance of his building too much on practical *data*. He has an ill habit of prophesying, and goes on, though still deceived. The art of prophesying does not suit Mr. Cobbett's style. He has a knack of

fixing names and times and places. According to him, the Reformed Parliament was to meet in March, 1818—it did not, and we heard no more of the matter. When his predictions fail, he takes no farther notice of them, but applies himself to new ones—like the country-people who turn to see what weather there is in the almanac for the next week, though it has been out in its reckoning every day of the last.

Mr. Cobbett is great in attack, not in defence: he cannot fight an up-hill battle. He will not bear the least punishing. If any one turns upon him (which few people like to do) he immediately turns tail. Like an overgrown school-boy, he is so used to have it all his own way, that he cannot submit to any thing like competition or a struggle for the mastery; he must lay on all the blows, and take none. He is bullying and cowardly; a Big Ben in politics, who will fall upon others and crush them by his weight, but is not prepared for resistance, and is soon staggered by a few smart blows. Whenever he has been set upon he has slunk out of the controversy. The Edinburgh Review made (what is called) a dead set at him some years ago, to which he only retorted by an eulogy on the superior neatness of an English kitchen-garden to a Scotch one. I remember going one day into a book-seller's shop in Fleet-street to ask for the Review; and on my expressing my opinion to a young Scotchman, who stood behind the counter, that Mr. Cobbett might hit as hard in his reply, the North Briton said with some alarm—"But you don't think, Sir, Mr. Cobbett will be able to injure the Scottish nation?" I said I could not speak to that point, but I thought he was very well able

to defend himself. He however did not, but has borne a grudge to the Edinburgh Review ever since, which he hates worse than the Quarterly. I cannot say I do.*

* Mr. Cobbett speaks almost as well as he writes. The only time I ever saw him he seemed to me a very pleasant man—easy of access, affable, clear-headed, simple and mild in his manner, deliberate and unruffled in his speech, though some of his expressions were not very qualified. His figure is tall and portly. He has a good sensible face—rather full, with little grey eyes, a hard, square forehead, a ruddy complexion, with hair grey or powdered ; and had on a scarlet broad-cloth waistcoat with the flaps of the pockets hanging down, as was the custom for gentlemen-farmers in the last century, or as we see it in the pictures of Members of Parliament in the reign of George I. I certainly did not think less favourably of him for seeing him.

Table Talk, 1821.

ON READING OLD BOOKS

I HATE to read new books. There are twenty or thirty volumes that I have read over and over again, and these are the only ones that I have any desire ever to read at all. It was a long time before I could bring myself to sit down to the *Tales of My Landlord*, but now that author's works have made a considerable addition to my scanty library. I am told that some of Lady Morgan's are good, and have been recommended to look into *Anastasius*; but I have not yet ventured upon that task. A lady, the other day, could not refrain from expressing her surprise to a friend, who said he had been reading *Delphine*:—she asked,—If it had not been published some time back? Women judge of books as they do of fashions or complexions, which are admired only “in their newest gloss.” That is not my way. I am not one of those who trouble the circulating libraries much, or pester the booksellers for mail-coach copies of standard periodical publications. I cannot say that I am greatly addicted to black-letter, but I profess myself well versed in the marble bindings of Andrew Millar, in the middle of the last century; nor does my taste revolt at Thurloe's State Papers, in Russia leather; or an ample impression of Sir William Temple's Essays, with a portrait after Sir Godfrey Kneller in front. I do not think altogether

the worse of a book for having survived the author a generation or two. I have more confidence in the dead than the living. Contemporary writers may generally be divided into two classes—one's friends or one's foes. Of the first we are compelled to think too well, and of the last we are disposed to think too ill, to receive much genuine pleasure from the perusal, or to judge fairly of the merits of either. One candidate for literary fame, who happens to be of our acquaintance, writes finely, and like a man of genius ; but unfortunately has a foolish face, which spoils a delicate passage :—another inspires us with the highest respect for his personal talents and character, but does not quite come up to our expectations in print. All these contradictions and petty details interrupt the calm current of our reflections. If you want to know what any of the authors were who lived before our time, and are still objects of anxious inquiry, you have only to look into their works. But the dust and smoke and noise of modern literature have nothing in common with the pure, silent air of immortality.

When I take up a work that I have read before (the oftener the better) I know what I have to expect. The satisfaction is not lessened by being anticipated. When the entertainment is altogether new, I sit down to it as I should to a strange dish,—turn and pick out a bit here and there, and am in doubt what to think of the composition. There is a want of confidence and security to second appetite. New-fangled books are also like made-dishes in this respect, that they are generally little else than hashes and *rifaccimenti* of what has been served up entire and in a more natural state at other times.

Besides, in thus turning to a well-known author, there is not only an assurance that my time will not be thrown away, or my palate nauseated with the most insipid or vilest trash,—but I shake hands with, and look an old, tried, and valued friend in the face,—compare notes, and chat the hours away. It is true, we form dear friendships with such ideal guests—dearer, alas ! and more lasting, than those with our most intimate acquaintance. In reading a book which is an old favourite with me (say the first novel I ever read) I not only have the pleasure of imagination and of a critical relish of the work, but the pleasures of memory added to it. It recalls the same feelings and associations which I had in first reading it, and which I can never have again in any other way. Standard productions of this kind are links in the chain of our conscious being. They bind together the different scattered divisons of our personal identity. They are landmarks and guides in our journey through life. They are pegs and loops on which we can hang up, or from which we can take down, at pleasure, the wardrobe of a moral imagination, the relics of our best affections, the tokens and records of our happiest hours. They are “ for thoughts and for remembrance ! ” They are like Fortunatus’s Wishing-Cap—they give us the best riches —those of Fancy ; and transport us, not over half the globe, but (which is better) over half our lives, at a word’s notice !

My father Shandy solaced himself with Bruscambille. Give me for this purpose a volume of Peregrine Pickle or Tom Jones. Open either of them any where—at the Memoirs of Lady Vane, or the adventures at the mas-

querade with Lady Bellaston, or the disputes between Thwackum and Square, or the escape of Molly Seagrim, or the incident of Sophia and her muff, or the edifying prolixity of her aunt's lecture—and there I find the same delightful, busy, bustling scene as ever, and feel myself the same as when I was first introduced into the midst of it. Nay, sometimes the sight of an odd volume of these good old English authors on a stall, or the name lettered on the back among others on the shelves of a library, answers the purpose, revives the whole train of ideas, and sets “the puppets dallying.” Twenty years are struck off the list, and I am a child again. A sage philosopher, who was not a very wise man, said, that he should like very well to be young again, if he could take his experience along with him. This ingénious person did not seem to be aware, by the gravity of his remark, that the great advantage of being young is to be without this weight of experience, which he would fain place upon the shoulders of youth, and which never comes too late with years. Oh! what a privilege to be able to let this hump, like Christian's burthen, drop from off one's back, and transport one's self, by the help of a little musty duodecimo, to the time when “ignorance was bliss,” and when we first got a peep at the *rarée-show* of the world, through the glass of fiction—gazing at mankind, as we do at wild beasts in a menagerie, through the bars of their cages,—or at curiosities in a museum, that we must not touch! For myself, not only are the old ideas of the contents of the work brought back to my mind in all their vividness, but the old associations of the faces and persons of those I then knew, as they

were in their life-time—the place where I sat to read the volume, the day when I got it, the feeling of the air, the fields, the sky—return, and all my early impressions with them. This is better to me—those places, those times, those persons, and those feelings that come across me as I retrace the story and devour the page, are to me better far than the wet sheets of the last new novel from the Ballantyne press, to say nothing of the Minerva press in Leadenhall-street. It is like visiting the scenes of early youth. I think of the time “when I was in my father’s house, and my path ran down with butter and honey,”—when I was a little, thoughtless child, and had no other wish or care but to con my daily task, and be happy!—*Tom Jones*, I remember, was the first work that broke the spell. It came down in numbers once a fortnight, in Cooke’s pocket-edition, embellished with cuts. I had hitherto read only in school-books, and a tiresome ecclesiastical history (with the exception of Mrs. Radcliffe’s *Romance of the Forest*) : but this had a different relish with it,—“sweet in the mouth,” though not “bitter in the belly.” It smacked of the world I lived in, and in which I was to live—and shewed me groups, “gay creatures” not “of the element,” but of the earth; not “living in the clouds,” but travelling the same road that I did;—some that had passed on before me, and others that might soon overtake me. My heart had palpitated at the thoughts of a boarding-school ball, or gala-day at Midsummer or Christmas : but the world I had found out in Cooke’s edition of the British Novelists was to me a dance through life, a perpetual gala-day. The sixpenny numbers of this work

regularly contrived to leave off just in the middle of a sentence, and in the nick of a story, where Tom Jones discovers Square behind the blanket ; or where Parson Adams, in the inextricable confusion of events, very undesignedly gets to bed to Mrs. Slip-slop. Let me caution the reader against this impression of Joseph Andrews ; for there is a picture of Fanny in it which he should not set his heart on, lest he should never meet with any thing like it ; or if he should, it would, perhaps, be better for him that he had not. It was just like — — ! With what eagerness I used to look forward to the next number, and open the prints ! Ah ! never again shall I feel the enthusiastic delight with which I gazed at the figures, and anticipated the story and adventures of Major Bath and Commodore Trunnion, of Trim and my Uncle Toby, of Don Quixote and Sancho and Dapple, of Gil Blas and Dame Lorenza Sephora, of Laura and the fair Lucretia, whose lips open and shut like buds of roses. To what nameless ideas did they give rise,—with what airy delights I filled up the outlines, as I hung in silence over the page !—Let me still recal them, that they may breathe fresh life into me, and that I may live that birthday of thought and romantic pleasure over again ! Talk of the *ideal* ! This is the only true ideal—the heavenly tints of Fancy reflected in the bubbles that float upon the spring-tide of human life.

Oh ! Memory ! shield me from the world's poor strife,
And give those scenes thine everlasting life !

The paradox with which I set out is, I hope, less startling than it was ; the reader will, by this time, have

been let into my secret. Much about the same time, or I believe rather earlier, I took a particular satisfaction in reading Chubb's Tracts, and I often think I will get them again to wade through. There is a high gusto of polemical divinity in them ; and you fancy that you hear a club of shoemakers at Salisbury, debating a disputable text from one of St. Paul's Epistles in a workmanlike style, with equal shrewdness and pertinacity. I cannot say much for my metaphysical studies, into which I launched shortly after with great ardour, so as to make a toil of a pleasure. I was presently entangled in the briars and thorns of subtle distinctions,—of " fate, free-will, fore-knowledge absolute," though I cannot add that " in their wandering mazes I found no end " ; for I did arrive at some very satisfactory and potent conclusions ; nor will I go so far, however ungrateful the subject might seem, as to exclaim with Marlowe's Faustus—" Would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book "—that is, never studied such authors as Hartley, Hume, Berkeley, &c. Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding is, however, a work from which I never derived either pleasure or profit ; and Hobbes, dry and powerful as he is, I did not read till long afterwards. I read a few poets, which did not much hit my taste,—for I would have the reader understand, I am deficient in the faculty of imagination ; but I fell early upon French romances and philosophy, and devoured them tooth-and-nail. Many a dainty repast have I made of the New Eloise ;—the description of the kiss ; the excursion on the water ; the letter of St. Preux, recalling the time of their first loves ; and the account of Julia's death ; these I read

over and over again with unspeakable delight and wonder. Some years after, when I met with this work again, I found I had lost nearly my whole relish for it (except some few parts) and was, I remember, very much mortified with the change in my taste, which I sought to attribute to the smallness and gilt edges of the edition I had bought, and its being perfumed with rose-leaves. Nothing could exceed the gravity, the solemnity with which I carried home and read the Dedication to the Social Contract, with some other pieces of the same author, which I had picked up at a stall in a coarse leathern cover. Of the Confessions I have spoken elsewhere, and may repeat what I have said—"Sweet is the dew of their memory, and pleasant the balm of their recollection!" Their beauties are not "scattered like stray-gifts o'er the earth," but sown thick on the page, rich and rare. I wish I had never read the Emilius, or read it with less implicit faith. I had no occasion to pamper my natural aversion to affectation or pretence, by romantic and artificial means. I had better have formed myself on the model of Sir Fopling Flutter. There is a class of persons whose virtues and most shining qualities sink in, and are concealed by, an absorbent ground of modesty and reserve; and such a one I do, without vanity, profess myself.* Now these are the very persons who are likely to attach themselves to the character of Emilius, and of whom it is sure to be

* Nearly the same sentiment was wittily and happily expressed by a friend, who had some lottery puffs, which he had been employed to write, returned on his hands for their too great severity of thought and classical terseness of style, and who observed on that occasion, that "Modest merit never can succeed!"

the bane. This dull, phlegmatic, retiring humour is not in a fair way to be corrected, but confirmed and rendered desperate, by being in that work held up as an object of imitation, as an example of simplicity and magnanimity—by coming upon us with all the recommendations of novelty, surprise, and superiority to the prejudices of the world—by being stuck upon a pedestal, made amiable, dazzling, a *leurre de dupe*! The reliance on solid worth which it inculcates, the preference of sober truth to gaudy tinsel, hangs like a mill-stone round the neck of the imagination—“a load to sink a navy”—impedes our progress, and blocks up every prospect in life. A man, to get on, to be successful, conspicuous, applauded, should not retire upon the centre of his conscious resources, but be always at the circumference of appearances. He must envelop himself in a halo of mystery—he must ride in an equipage of opinion—he must walk with a train of self-conceit following him—he must not strip himself to a buff-jerkin, to the doublet and hose of his real merits, but must surround himself with a *cortège* of prejudices, like the signs of the Zodiac—he must seem any thing but what he is, and then he may pass for any thing he pleases. The world love to be amused by hollow professions, to be deceived by flattering appearances, to live in a state of hallucination ; and can forgive every thing but the plain, downright, simple honest truth—such as we see it chalked out in the character of Emilius.—To return from this digression, which is a little out of place here.

Books have in a great measure lost their power over me ; nor can I revive the same interest in them as

formerly. I perceive when a thing is good, rather than feel it. It is true,

Marcian Colonna is a dainty book ;

and the reading of Mr. Keats's Eve of Saint Agnes lately made me regret that I was not young again. The beautiful and tender images there conjured up, " come like shadows—so depart." The " tiger-moth's wings," which he has spread over his rich poetic blazonry, just flit across my fancy ; the gorgeous twilight window which he has painted over again in his verse, to me " blushes " almost in vain " with blood of queens and kings." I know how I should have felt at one time in reading such passages ; and that is all. The sharp luscious flavour, the fine *aroma* is fled, and nothing but the stalk, the bran, the husk of literature is left. If any one were to ask me what I read now, I might answer with my Lord Hamlet in the play—" Words, words, words."—" What is the matter ? "—" *Nothing !*"—They have scarce a meaning. But it was not always so. There was a time when, to my thinking, every word was a flower or a pearl, like those which dropped from the mouth of the little peasant-girl in the Fairy tale, or like those that fall from the great preacher in the Caledonian Chapel ! I drank of the stream of knowledge that tempted, but did not mock my lips, as of the river of life, freely. How eagerly I slaked my thirst of German sentiment, " as the hart that panteth for the water-springs " ; how I bathed and revelled, and added my floods of tears to Goëthe's Sorrows of Werter, and to Schiller's Robbers—

Giving my stock of more to that which had too much !

I read, and assented with all my soul to Coleridge's fine Sonnet, beginning—

Schiller ! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shuddering midnight I had sent,
From the dark dungeon of the tow'r time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry !

I believe I may date my insight into the mysteries of poetry from the commencement of my acquaintance with the authors of the Lyrical Ballads ; at least, my discrimination of the higher sorts—not my predilection for such writers as Goldsmith or Pope : nor do I imagine they will say I got my liking for the Novelists, or the comic writers,—for the characters of Valentine, Tattle, or Miss Prue, from them. If so, I must have got from them what they never had themselves. In points where poetic diction and conception are concerned, I may be at a loss, and liable to be imposed upon : but in forming an estimate of passages relating to common life and manners, I cannot think I am a plagiarist from any man. I there “ know my cue without a prompter.” I may say of such studies—*Intus et in cute*. I am just able to admire those literal touches of observation and description, which persons of loftier pretensions over-look and despise. I think I comprehend something of the characteristic part of Shakespear ; and in him indeed, all is characteristic, even the nonsense and poetry. I believe it was the celebrated Sir Humphry Davy who used to

say, that Shakespear was rather a metaphysician than a poet. At any rate, it was not ill said. I wish that I had sooner known the dramatic writers contemporary with Shakespear ; for in looking them over about a year ago, I almost revived my old passion for reading, and my old delight in books, though they were very nearly new to me. The Periodical Essayists I read long ago. The Spectator I liked extremely : but the Tatler took my fancy most. I read the others soon after, the Rambler, the Adventurer, the World, the Connoisseur : I was not sorry to get to the end of them, and have no desire to go regularly through them again. I consider myself a thorough adept in Richardson. I like the longest of his novels best, and think no part of them tedious ; nor should I ask to have any thing better to do than to read them from beginning to end, to take them up when I chose, and lay them down when I was tired, in some old family mansion in the country, till every word and syllable relating to the bright Clarissa, the divine Clementina, the beautiful Pamela, "with every trick and line of their sweet favour," were once more " graven in my heart's table." * I have a sneaking kindness for Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné*—for the deserted mansion, and straggling gilli-flowers on the mouldering

* During the peace of Amiens, a young English officer, of the name of Lovelace, was presented at Buonaparte's levee. Instead of the usual question, "Where have you served, Sir ?" the First Consul immediately addressed him, "I perceive your name, Sir, is the same as that of the hero of Richardson's Romance !" Here was a Consul. The young man's uncle, who was called Lovelace, told me this anecdote while we were stopping together at Calais. I had also been thinking that his was the same name as that of the hero of Richardson's Romance. This is one of my reasons for liking Buonaparte.

garden-wall ; and still more for his *Man of Feeling* ; not that it is better, nor so good ; but at the time I read it, I sometimes thought of the heroine, Miss Walton, and of Miss —— together, and “ that ligament, fine as it was, was never broken ! ”—One of the poets that I have always read with most pleasure, and can wander about in for ever with a sort of voluptuous indolence, is Spenser; and I like Chaucer even better. The only writer among the Italians I can pretend to any knowledge of, is Boccacio, and of him I cannot express half my admiration. His story of the Hawk I could read and think of from day to day, just as I would look at a picture of Titian’s !—

I remember, as long ago as the year 1798, going to a neighbouring town (Shrewsbury, where Farquhar has laid the plot of his *Recruiting Officer*) and bringing home with me, “ at one proud swoop,” a copy of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and another of Burke’s *Reflections on the French Revolution*—both which I have still ; and I still recollect, when I see the covers, the pleasure with which I dipped into them as I returned with my double prize. I was set up for one while. That time is past “ with all its giddy raptures ”: but I am still anxious to preserve its memory, “ embalmed with odours.”—With respect to the first of these works, I would be permitted to remark here in passing, that it is a sufficient answer to the German criticism which has since been started against the character of Satan (*viz.* that it is not one of disgusting deformity, or pure, defecated malice) to say that Milton has there drawn, not the abstract principle of evil, not a devil incarnate, but a fallen angel. This is the scrip-

tural account, and the poet has followed it. We may safely retain such passages as that well-known one—

—His form had not yet lost
All her original brightness ; nor appear'd
Less than archangel ruin'd ; and the excess
Of glory obscur'd—

for the theory, which is opposed to them, “ falls flat upon the grunsel edge, and shames its worshippers.” Let us hear no more then of this monkish cant, and bigoted outcry for the restoration of the horns and tail of the devil !—Again, as to the other work, Burke's *Reflections*, I took a particular pride and pleasure in it, and read it to myself and others for months afterwards. I had reason for my prejudice in favour of this author. To understand an adversary is some praise : to admire him is more. I thought I did both : I knew I did one. From the first time I ever cast my eyes on any thing of Burke's (which was an extract from his *Letter to a Noble Lord* in a three-times-a-week paper, *The St. James's Chronicle*, in 1796), I said to myself, “ This is true eloquence : this is a man pouring out his mind on paper.” All other style seemed to me pedantic and impertinent. Dr. Johnson's was walking on stilts ; and even Junius's (who was at that time a favourite with me), with all his terseness, shrunk up into little antithetic points and well-trimmed sentences. But Burke's style was forked and playful as the lightning, crested like the serpent. He delivered plain things on a plain ground ; but when he rose, there was no end of his flights and circumgyrations

—and in this very Letter, “ he, like an eagle in a dove-cot, fluttered *his Volscians* ” (the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale) * “ in Corioli.” I did not care for his doctrines. I was then, and am still, proof against their contagion ; but I admired the author, and was considered as not a very staunch partisan of the opposite side, though I thought myself that an abstract proposition was one thing—a masterly transition, a brilliant metaphor, another. I conceived too that he might be wrong in his main argument, and yet deliver fifty truths in arriving at a false conclusion. I remember Coleridge assuring me, as a poetical and political set-off to my sceptical admiration, that Wordsworth had written an Essay on Marriage, which, for manly thought and nervous expression, he deemed incomparably superior. As I had not, at that time, seen any specimens of Mr. Wordsworth’s prose style, I could not express my doubts on the subject. If there are greater prose-writers than Burke, they either lie out of my course of study, or are beyond my sphere of comprehension. I am too old to be a convert to a new mythology of genius. The niches are occupied, the tables are full. If such is still my admiration of this man’s misapplied powers, what must it have been at a time when I myself was in vain trying, year after year, to write a single Essay, nay, a single page or sentence ; when I regarded the wonders of his pen with the longing eyes of one who was dumb and a changeling ; and when, to be able to convey the slightest conception of my meaning to others in words, was the height of an almost hopeless ambition ! But I never measured others’

* He is there called “ Citizen Lauderdale.” Is this the present Earl ?

excellences by my own defects: though a sense of my own incapacity, and of the steep, impassable ascent from me to them, made me regard them with greater awe and fondness. I have thus run through most of my early studies and favourite authors, some of whom I have since criticised more at large. Whether those observations will survive me, I neither know nor do I much care: but to the works themselves, "worthy of all acceptation," and to the feelings they have always excited in me since I could distinguish a meaning in language, nothing shall ever prevent me from looking back with gratitude and triumph. To have lived in the cultivation of an intimacy with such works, and to have familiarly relished such names, is not to have lived quite in vain.

There are other authors whom I have never read, and yet whom I have frequently had a great desire to read, from some circumstance relating to them. Among these is Lord Clarendon's History of the Grand Rebellion, after which I have a hankering, from hearing it spoken of by good judges—from my interest in the events, and knowledge of the characters from other sources, and from having seen fine portraits of most of them. I like to read a well-penned character, and Clarendon is said to have been a master in this way. I should like to read Froissart's Chronicles, Hollingshed and Stowe, and Fuller's Worthies. I intend, whenever I can, to read Beaumont and Fletcher all through. There are fifty-two of their plays, and I have only read a dozen or fourteen of them. A Wife for a Month, and Thierry and Theodoret, are, I am told, delicious, and I can believe it. I should like to read the speeches in Thucydides, and Guicciardini's

History of Florence, and Don Quixote in the
I have often thought of reading the Loves of
and Sigismunda, and the Galatea of the same
But I somehow reserve them like "another "
I should also like to read the last new novel (if I
sure it was so) of the author of Waverley :—no o
be more glad than I to find it the best !—

The London Magazine, February 1826
The Plain Speaker

ON ACTORS AND ACTING—I

PLAYERS are “ the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time ” ; the motley representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Their life is a voluntary dream ; a studied madness. The height of their ambition is to be *beside themselves*. To-day kings, to-morrow beggars, it is only when they are themselves that they are nothing. Made up of mimic laughter and tears, passing from the extremes of joy or woe at the prompter’s call, they wear the livery of other men’s fortunes ; their very thoughts are not their own. They are, as it were, train-bearers in the pageant of life, and hold a glass up to humanity, fraailer than itself. We see ourselves at second-hand in them : they show us all that we are, all that we wish to be, and all that we dread to be. The stage is an epitome, a bettered likeness of the world, with the dull part left out : and, indeed, with this omission, it is nearly big enough to hold all the rest. What brings the resemblance nearer is, that, as *they* imitate us, we, in our turn, imitate them. How many fine gentlemen do we owe to the stage ? How many romantic lovers are mere Romeos in masquerade ? How many soft bosoms have heaved with Juliet’s sighs ? They teach us when to laugh and when to weep, when to love and when to hate, upon principle and with a good

grace ! Wherever there is a play-house, the world will go on not amiss. The stage not only refines the manners, but it is the best teacher of morals, for it is the truest and most intelligible picture of life. It stamps the image of virtue on the mind by first softening the rude materials of which it is composed, by a sense of pleasure. It regulates the passions by giving a loose to the imagination. It points out the selfish and depraved to our detestation, the amiable and generous to our admiration ; and if it clothes the more seductive vices with the borrowed graces of wit and fancy, even those graces operate as a diversion to the coarser poison of experience and bad example, and often prevent or carry off the infection by inoculating the mind with a certain taste and elegance. To show how little we agree with the common declamations against the immoral tendency of the stage on this score, we will hazard a conjecture, that the acting of the Beggar's Opera a certain number of nights every year since it was first brought out, has done more towards putting down the practice of highway robbery, than all the gibbets that ever were erected. A person, after seeing this piece, is too deeply imbued with a sense of humanity, is in too good humour with himself and the rest of the world, to set about cutting throats or rifling pockets. Whatever makes a jest of vice, leaves it too much a matter of indifference for any one in his senses to rush desperately on his ruin for its sake. We suspect that just the contrary effect must be produced by the representation of George Barnwell, which is too much in the style of the Ordinary's sermon to meet with any better success. The mind, in such

cases, instead of being deterred by the alarming consequences held out to it, revolts against the denunciation of them as an insult offered to its free-will, and, in a spirit of defiance, returns a practical answer to them, by daring the worst that can happen. The most striking lesson ever read to levity and licentiousness, is in the last act of the *Inconstant*, where young Mirabel is preserved by the fidelity of his mistress, Orinda, in the disguise of a page, from the hands of assassins, into whose power he has been allured by the temptations of vice and beauty. There never was a rake who did not become in imagination a reformed man, during the representation of the last trying scenes of this admirable comedy.

If the stage is useful as a school of instruction, it is no less so as a source of amusement. It is the source of the greatest enjoyment at the time, and a never-failing fund of agreeable reflection afterwards. The merits of a new play, or of a new actor, are always among the first topics of polite conversation. One way in which public exhibitions contribute to refine and humanise mankind, is by supplying them with ideas and subjects of conversation and interest in common. The progress of civilisation is in proportion to the number of commonplaces current in society. For instance, if we meet with a stranger at an inn or in a stage-coach, who knows nothing but his own affairs, his shop, his customers, his farm, his pigs, his poultry, we can carry on no conversation with him on these local and personal matters: the only way is to let him have all the talk to himself. But if he has fortunately ever seen Mr. Liston act, this is an immediate topic of mutual conversation, and we agree together the

rest of the evening in discussing the merits of that inimitable actor, with the same satisfaction as in talking over the affairs of the most intimate friend.

If the stage thus introduces us familiarly to our contemporaries, it also brings us acquainted with former times. It is an interesting revival of past ages, manners, opinions, dresses, person, and actions—whether it carries us back to the wars of York and Lancaster, or half-way back to the heroic times of Greece and Rome, in some translation from the French, or quite back to the age of Charles II. in the scenes of Congreve and of Etherege (the gay Sir George !)—happy age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives ; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no further than the choice of a sword-knot, or the adjustment of a side-curl ; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing eloquence of dress ; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies in giddy mazes through the walks of St. James's Park !

A good company of comedians, a Theatre-Royal judiciously managed, is your true Herald's College ; the only Antiquarian Society, that is worth a rush. It is for this reason that there is such an air of romance about players, and that it is pleasanter to see them, even in their own persons, than any of the three learned professions. We feel more respect for John Kemble in a plain coat, than for the Lord Chancellor on the wool-sack. He is surrounded, to our eyes, with a greater number of imposing recollections : he is a more reverend piece of formality ; a more complicated tissue of costume. We do not know whether to look upon this

accomplished actor as Pierre or King John or Coriolanus or Cato or Leontes or the Stranger. But we see in him a stately hieroglyphic of humanity ; a living monument of departed greatness, a sombre comment on the rise and fall of kings. We look after him till he is out of sight, as we listen to a story of one of Ossian's heroes, to " a tale of other times ! "

One of the most affecting things we know is to see a favourite actor take leave of the stage. We were present not long ago when Mr. Bannister quitted it. We do not wonder that his feelings were overpowered on the occasion : ours were nearly so too. We remembered him, in the first heyday of our youthful spirits, in the *Prize*, in which he played so delightfully with that fine old croaker Suett, and Madame Storace—in the farce of *My Grandmother*, in the *Son-in-Law*, in *Autolycus*, and in *Scrub*, in which our satisfaction was at its height. At that time, King and Parsons, and Dodd, and Quick, and Edwin were in the full vigour of their reputation, who are now all gone. We still feel the vivid delight with which we used to see their names in the play-bills, as we went along to the Theatre. Bannister was one of the last of these that remained ; and we parted with him as we should with one of our oldest and best friends. The most pleasant feature in the profession of a player, and which, indeed, is peculiar to it, is that we not only admire the talents of those who adorn it, but we contract a personal intimacy with them. There is no class of society whom so many persons regard with affection as actors. We greet them on the stage ; we like to meet them in the streets ; they almost always recall to us pleasant associa-

tions ; and we feel our gratitude excited, without the uneasiness of a sense of obligation. The very gaiety and popularity, however, which surround the life of a favourite performer, make the retiring from it a very serious business. It glances a mortifying reflection on the shortness of human life, and the vanity of human pleasures. Something reminds us, that " all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

The Examiner, January 5, 1817.

The Round Table, 1817.

ON ACTORS AND ACTING—II

IT has been considered as the misfortune of first-rate talents for the stage, that they leave no record behind them except that of vague rumour, and that the genius of a great actor perishes with him, “leaving the world no copy.” This is a misfortune, or at least an unpleasant circumstance, to actors ; but it is, perhaps, an advantage to the stage. It leaves an opening to originality. The stage is always beginning anew ; the candidates for theatrical reputation are always setting out afresh, unencumbered by the affectation of the faults or excellences of their predecessors. In this respect, we should imagine that the average quantity of dramatic talent remains more nearly the same than that in any other walk of art. In no other instance do the complaints of the degeneracy of the moderns seem so unfounded as in this ; and Colley Cibber’s account of the regular decline of the stage, from the time of Shakespear to that of Charles II., and from the time of Charles II. to the beginning of George II. appears quite ridiculous. The stage is a place where genius is sure to come upon its legs, in a generation or two at farthest. In the other arts (as painting and poetry), it has been contended that what has been well done already, by giving rise to endless vapid imitations, is an obstacle to what might be done well hereafter : that

the models or *chef-d'œuvres* of art, where they are accumulated, choke up the path to excellence ; and that the works of genius, where they can be rendered permanent and handed down from age to age, not only prevent, but render superfluous, future productions of the same kind. We have not, neither do we want, two Shakespears, two Miltons, two Raphaels, any more than we require two suns in the same sphere. Even Miss O'Neill stands a little in the way of our recollections of Mrs. Siddons. But Mr. Kean is an excellent substitute for the memory of Garrick, whom we never saw. When an author dies, it is no matter, for his works remain. When a great actor dies, there is a void produced in society, a gap which requires to be filled up. Who does not go to see Kean ? Who, if Garrick were alive, would go to see him ? At least one or the other must have quitted the stage. We have seen what a ferment has been excited among our living artists by the exhibition of the works of the old Masters at the British Gallery. What would the actors say to it, if, by any spell or power of necromancy, all the celebrated actors, for the last hundred years could be made to appear again on the boards of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, for the last time, in all their most brilliant parts ? What a rich treat to the town, what a feast for the critics, to go and see Betterton, and Booth, and Wilks, and Sandford, and Nokes, and Leigh, and Penkethman, and Bullock, and Estcourt, and Dogget, and Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Montfort, and Mrs. Oldfield, and Mrs. Bracegirdle, and Mrs. Cibber, and Cibber himself, the prince of coxcombs, and Macklin, and Quin, and Rich, and Mrs. Clive, and Mrs. Pritchard,

and Mrs. Abington, and Weston, and Shuter, and Garrick, and all the rest of those who “ gladdened life, and whose deaths eclipsed the gaiety of nations ” ! We should certainly be there. We should buy a ticket for the season. We should enjoy *our hundred days* again. We should not lose a single night. We would not, for a great deal, be absent from Betterton’s Hamlet or his Brutus, or from Booth’s Cato, as it was first acted to the contending applause of Whigs and Tories. We should be in the first row when Mrs. Barry (who was kept by Lord Rochester, and with whom Otway was in love) played Monimia or Belvidera ; and we suppose we should go to see Mrs. Bracegirdle (with whom all the world was in love) in all her parts. We should then know exactly whether Penkethman’s manner of picking a chicken, and Bullock’s mode of devouring asparagus, answered to the ingenious account of them in the Tatler ; and whether Dogget was equal to Dowton—whether Mrs. Montfort * or Mrs.

* The following lively description of this actress is given by Cibber in his *Apology* :

“ What found most employment for her whole various excellence at once, was the part of Melantha, in *Marriage-à-la-mode*. Melantha is as finished an impertinent as ever fluttered in a drawing-room, and seems to contain the most complete system of female foppery that could possibly be crowded into the tortured form of a fine lady. Her language, dress, motion, manners, soul, and body, are in a continual hurry to be something more than is necessary or commendable. And though I doubt it will be a vain labour to offer you a just likeness of Mrs. Montfort’s action, yet the fantastic impression is still so strong in my memory, that I cannot help saying something, though fantastically, about it. The first ridiculous airs that break from her are upon a gallant never seen before, who delivers her a letter from her father, recommending him to her good graces as an honourable lover. Here now, one would think she might naturally show a little of the sex’s decent reserve,

Abington was the finest lady—whether Wilks or Cibber was the best Sir Harry Wildair—whether Macklin was really “the Jew that Shakespear drew,” and whether Garrick was, upon the whole, so great an actor as the world have made him out ! Many people have a strong desire to pry into the secrets of futurity : for our own parts, we should be satisfied if we had the power to recall the dead, and live the past over again as often as we pleased ! Players, after all, have little reason to complain of their hard-earned, short-lived popularity. One thunder of applause from pit, boxes, and gallery, is equal to a whole immortality of posthumous fame : and when we hear an actor, whose modesty is equal to his merit, declare, that he would like to see a dog wag his tail in approbation, what must he feel when he sees the whole house in a roar ! Besides, Fame, as if their reputation had been entrusted to her alone, has been particularly

though never so slightly covered ! No, sir ; not a tittle of it ; modesty is the virtue of a poor-soul'd country gentlewoman : she is too much a court-lady, to be under so vulgar a confusion : she reads the letter, therefore, with a careless, dropping lip, and an erected brow, humming it hastily over, as if she were impatient to outgo her father's commands, by making a complete conquest of him at once : and that the letter might not embarrass her attack, crack ! she crumbles it at once into her palm, and pours upon him her whole artillery of airs, eyes, and motion ; down goes her dainty, diving body to the ground, as if she were sinking under the conscious load of her own attractions ; then launches into a flood of fine language and compliment, still playing her chest forward in fifty falls and risings, like a swan upon waving water ; and, to complete her impertinence, she is so rapidly fond of her own wit, that she will not give her lover leave to praise it : Silent assenting bows, and vain endeavours to speak, are all the share of the conversation he is admitted to, which at last he is relieved from, by her engagement to half a score visits, which she *swims* from him to make, with a promise to return in a twinkling.”—*The Life of Colley Cibber*, p. 138.

careful of the renown of her theatrical favourites : she forgets one by one, and year by year, those who have been great lawyers, great statesmen, and great warriors in their day ; but the name of Garrick still survives with the works of Reynolds and of Johnson.

Actors have been accused, as a profession, of being extravagant and dissipated. While they are said to be so as a piece of common cant, they are likely to continue so. But there is a sentence in Shakespear which should be stuck as a label in the mouths of our beadles and whippers-in of morality : “ The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together : our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not : and our vices would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues.” With respect to the extravagance of actors, as a traditional character, it is not to be wondered at. They live from hand to mouth : they plunge from want into luxury ; they have no means of making money *breed*, and all professions that do not live by turning money into money, or have not a certainty of accumulating it in the end by parsimony, spend it. Uncertain of the future, they make sure of the present moment. This is not unwise. Chilled with poverty, steeped in contempt, they sometimes pass into the sunshine of fortune, and are lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour ; yet even there cannot calculate on the continuance of success, but are, “ like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready with every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep ! ” Besides, if the young enthusiast, who is smitten with the stage, and with the public as a mistress, were naturally a close *hunks*, he would

become or remain a city clerk, instead of turning player. Again, with respect to the habit of convivial indulgence, an actor, to be a good one, must have a great spirit of enjoyment in himself, strong impulses, strong passions, and a strong sense of pleasure: for it is his business to imitate the passions, and to communicate pleasure to others. A man of genius is not a machine. The neglected actor may be excused if he drinks oblivion of his disappointments; the successful one, if he quaffs the applause of the world, and enjoys the friendship of those who are the friends of the favourites of fortune, in draughts of nectar. There is no path so steep as that of fame: no labour so hard as the pursuit of excellence. The intellectual excitement, inseparable from those professions which call forth all our sensibility to pleasure and pain, requires some corresponding physical excitement to support our failure, and not a little to allay the ferment of the spirits attendant on success. If there is any tendency to dissipation beyond this in the profession of a player, it is owing to the prejudices entertained against them, to that spirit of bigotry which in a neighbouring country would deny actors Christian burial after their death, and to that cant of criticism, which, in our own, slurs over their characters, while living, with a half-witted jest.

A London engagement is generally considered by actors as the *ne plus ultra* of their ambition, as "a consummation devoutly to be wished," as the great prize in the lottery of their professional life. But this appears to us, who are not in the secret, to be rather the prose termination of their adventurous career: it is the pro-

vincial commencement that is the poetical and truly enviable part of it. After that, they have comparatively little to hope or fear. "The wine of life is drunk, and but the lees remain." In London, they become gentlemen, and the King's servants: but it is the romantic mixture of the hero and the vagabond that constitutes the essence of the player's life. It is the transition from their real to their assumed characters, from the contempt of the world to the applause of the multitude, that gives its zest to the latter, and raises them as much above common humanity at night, as in the daytime they are depressed below it. "Hurried from fierce extremes, by contrast made more fierce,"—it is rags and a flock-bed which give their splendour to a plume of feathers and a throne. We should suppose, that if the most admired actor on the London stage were brought to confession on this point, he would acknowledge that all the applause he had received from "brilliant and overflowing audiences," was nothing to the light-headed intoxication of unlooked-for success in a barn. In town, actors are criticised: in country-places, they are wondered at, or hooted at: it is of little consequence which, so that the interval is not too long between. For ourselves, we own that the description of the strolling player in *Gil Blas*, soaking his dry crusts in the well by the roadside, presents to us a perfect picture of human felicity.

The Examiner, January 5, 1817.
The Round Table, 1817.

ON SHAKESPEAR AND MILTON

IN looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact, than the supposition that in what we understand by the *fine arts*, as painting, and poetry, relative perfection is only the result of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once well done, constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feeling, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary, or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error, which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into the account the difference in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in biblical criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astronomy, &c., *i.e.* in things depending on mere inquiry and experiment, or on absolute demonstra-

tion, have been led hastily to conclude, that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors, and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth, and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle of limitation or decay: and, inquiring no farther about the matter, we infer, in the intoxication of our pride, and the height of our self-congratulation, that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face, that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and privilege of each, of science and of art:—of the one, never to attain its utmost limit of perfection; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespear, Dante, and Ariosto (Milton alone was of a later age, and not the worse for it)—Raphael,

Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio, the Greek sculptors and tragedians,—all lived near the beginning of their arts—perfected, and all but created them. These giant-sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth, but they tower above their fellows ; and the long line of their successors, in different ages, does not interpose any object to obstruct their view, or lessen their brightness. In strength and stature they are unrivalled ; in grace and beauty they have not been surpassed. In after-ages, and more refined periods, (as they are called) great men have arisen, one by one, as it were by throes and at intervals ; though in general the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of an inferior order ; as Tasso and Pope, among poets ; Guido and Vandyke, among painters. But in the earlier stages of the arts, as soon as the first mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language was sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters, and in constellations, never so to rise again !

The arts of painting and poetry are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense around us—with what we know, and see, and feel intimately. They flow from the sacred shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of nature. But the pulse of the passions assuredly beat as high, the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood three thousand, or three hundred years ago, as they are at present : the face of nature, and “ the human face divine ” shone as bright then as they have ever done. But it is *their* light, reflected by true genius on art, that marks out its path before it,

and sheds a glory round the Muses' feet, like that which

“ Circled Una’s angel face,
And made a sunshine in the shady place.”

The four greatest names in English poetry, are almost the four first we come to—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespear, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competition with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation ; while the two first (though “ the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves that they are underlings ”) either never emerged far above the horizon, or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time. The three first of these are excluded from Dr. Johnson’s Lives of the Poets (Shakespear indeed is so from the dramatic form of his compositions) : and the fourth, Milton, is admitted with a reluctant and churlish welcome.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life ; Spenser, as the poet of romance ; Shakespear as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term) ; and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are ; Spenser, as we wish them to be ; Shakespear, as they would be ; and Milton as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all : but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most sub-

servient in Chaucer, was habit, or inveterate prejudice ; in Spenser, novelty, and the love of the marvellous ; in Shakespear, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances ; and in Milton, only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity ; of Spenser, remoteness ; of Milton, elevation ; of Shakespear, every thing.—It has been said by some critic, that Shakespear was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit ; that they had all his other qualities but that ; that one writer has as much sense, another as much fancy, another as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true ; nor is the inference from it well-founded, even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware that, upon his own shewing, the great distinction of Shakspeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not his differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

The striking peculiarity of Shakespear's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself ; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all

their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He had “a mind reflecting ages past,” and present:—all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar: “All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave,” are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew, as those which they did not know, or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call, and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies “nodded to him, and did him courtesies”: and the night-hag bestrode the blast at the command of “his so potent art.” The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women: and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel, and act, as he makes them. He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but

seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, "subject to the same skyey influences," the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, "his frequent haunts and ancient neighbourhood," are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole "coheres semblably together" in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say,—you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decypher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the bye-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, "Me and thy *crying* self," flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us, with all that he must have suffered in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader, by the friendly expostulation of Malcolm—"What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows!" Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosen-crans and Guildenstern, somewhat abruptly concludes

his fine soliloquy on life by saying, “ Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.” Which is explained by their answer—“ My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you, whom we met on the way ” :—as if while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old schoolfellows from Wittenberg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth, at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not “ a combination and a form ” of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory of a character, that will do this : but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet’s imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal ; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the reader.—I may add in passing, that Shakespear always gives the best directions for the costume and carriage of his heroes. Thus to take one example, Ophelia gives the following account of Hamlet ; and as Ophelia had seen Hamlet, I should think her word ought to be taken against that of any modern authority.

“ *Ophelia.* My lord, as I was reading in my closet, Prince Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac’d, No hat upon his head, his stockings loose, Ungartred, and down-gyved to his ancle, Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other, And with a look so piteous, As if he had been sent from hell

To speak of horrors, thus he comes before me.

Polonius. Mad for thy love !

Oph. My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear it.

Pol. What said he ?

Oph. He took me by the wrist, and held me hard
Then goes he to the length of all his arm ;
And with his other han^d thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it : long staid he so ;
At last, a little shaking of my arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes ;
For out of doors he went without their help,
And to the last bended their light on me."

Act II. Scene 1.

How after this airy, fantastic idea of irregular grace and bewildered melancholy any one can play Hamlet, as we have seen it played, with strut, and stare, and antic right-angled sharp-pointed gestures, it is difficult to say, unless it be that Hamlet is not bound, by the prompter's cue, to study the part of Ophelia. The account of Ophelia's death begins thus :

" There is a willow hanging o'er a brook,
That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream." —

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious power of mind which is as true to nature as itself. The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath, and it is this part of them which would appear “ hoary ” in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind’s eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence :—“ He’s speaking now, or murmuring, where’s my serpent of old Nile ? ” How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her ! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved to risk another fight, “ It is my birth-day ; I had thought to have held it poor : but since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra.” What other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it ? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact.—That which, perhaps, more than any thing else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakespear from all others, is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out

of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood ; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it : so the dialogues in Shakespear are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis : all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality : each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination, every thing has a life, a place, and being of its own !

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform ; we get no new idea of them from first to last ; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate *traits* brought out in new situations ; they are like portraits or physiognomical studies, with the distinguishing features marked with inconceivable truth and precision, but that preserve the same unaltered air

and attitude. Shakespear's are historical figures, equally true and correct, but put into action, where every nerve and muscle is displayed in the struggle with others, with all the effect of collision and contrast, with every variety of light and shade. Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakespear's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered for his characters himself. In Shakespear they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakespear there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances. Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. His imagination, "nigh sphered in Heaven," claimed kindred only with what he saw from that height, and could raise to the same elevation with itself. He sat retired and kept his state alone, "playing with wisdom"; while Shakespear mingled with the crowd, and played the host, "to make society the sweeter welcome."

The passion in Shakespear is of the same nature as his delineation of character. It is not some one habitual feeling or sentiment preying upon itself, growing out of

itself, and moulding every thing to itself ; it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him ; subject to all the fluctuations of caprice and accident ; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the energies of the will ; irritated by obstacles or yielding to them ; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height ; now drunk with hope, now stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent. The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity : it is stretched on the wheel of destiny, in restless ecstasy. The passions are in a state of projection. Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process. Thus after Iago has been boasting to himself of the effect of his poisonous suggestions on the mind of Othello, “ which, with a little act upon the blood, will work like mines of sulphur,” he adds—

“ Look where he comes ! not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the East,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow’dst yesterday.”—

And he enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge ! The whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame ; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano. The dialogues in Lear, in Macbeth, that between Brutus and

Cassius, and nearly all those in Shakespear, where the interest is wrought up to its highest pitch, afford examples of this dramatic fluctuation of passion. The interest in Chaucer is quite different; it is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakespear, on the contrary, it is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms; while in the still pauses of the blast, we distinguish only the cries of despair, or the silence of death! Milton, on the other hand, takes the imaginative part of passion—that which remains after the event, which the mind reposes on when all is over, which looks upon circumstances from the remotest elevation of thought and fancy, and abstracts them from the world of action to that of contemplation. The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise, or force us upon action, “while rage with rage doth sympathise”; the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fills us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight. There are certain objects that strike the imagination, and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest, that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind. The heavenly bodies that hung over our heads wherever we go, and “in their untroubled element shall shine when we are laid in dust,

and all our cares forgotten," affect us in the same way. Thus Satan's address to the Sun has an epic, not a dramatic interest ; for though the second person in the dialogue makes no answer and feels no concern, yet the eye of that vast luminary is upon him, like the eye of heaven, and seems conscious of what he says, like an universal presence. Dramatic poetry and epic, in their perfection, indeed, approximate to and strengthen one another. Dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things, as the heroic does from human passion, but in theory they are distinct.—When Richard II. calls for the looking-glass to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation : " Oh, that I were a mockery-king of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke," we have here the utmost force of human passion, combined with the ideas of regal splendour and fallen power. When Milton says of Satan :

— " His form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appear'd
Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
Of glory obscur'd ; " —

the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility ; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround

the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakespear did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry consolation of an unmanly triumph over fallen greatness ; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, any thing superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world, they look upon with the most perfect indifference ; and they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. “ With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again.” —

Shakespear's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. “ It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.” Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes : or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, “ puts a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes.” He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while

describing it ; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other ; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. I will mention one or two which are very striking, and not much known, out of *Troilus and Cressida*. Æneas says to Agamemnon,

“ I ask that I may waken reverence,
And on the cheek be ready with a blush
Modest as morning, when she coldly eyes
The youthful Phœbus.”

Ulysses urging Achilles to shew himself in the field, says—

“ No man is the lord of anything,
Till he communicate his parts to others :
Nor doth he of himself know them for aught,
Till he behold them formed in the applause,
Where they're extended ! which like an arch rever-
berates

The voice again, or like a gate of steel,
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
Its figure and its heat."

Patroclus gives the indolent warrior the same advice.

" Rouse yourself ; and the weak wanton Cupid
Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane
Be shook to air."

Shakespear's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words : they come winged at his bidding ; and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat, on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination, fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom. They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building, and not the scaffolding to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and spell out the particular words and phrases, than the syllables of which they are composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles, in case of failure,

on a word as good. In Shakespear, any other word but the true one, is sure to be wrong. If any body, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description,

“ — Light thickens,
And the crow makes wing to the rooky wood,”

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for them equally expressive of the feeling. These remarks, however, are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakspeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination, and were his own. The language used for prose conversation and ordinary business is sometimes technical, and involved in the affectation of the time. Compare, for example, Othello's apology to the senate, relating “ his whole course of love,” with some of the preceding parts relating to his appointment, and the official dispatches from Cyprus. In this respect, “ the business of the state does him offence.” His versification is no less powerful, sweet, and varied. It has every occasional excellence, of sullen intricacy, crabbed and perplexed, or of the smoothest and loftiest expansion—from the ease and familiarity of measured conversation to the lyrical sounds

“ —Of ditties highly penned,
Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower,
With ravishing division to her lute.”

It is the only blank verse in the language, except Milton's that for itself is readable. It is not stately and uniformly

swelling like his, but varied and broken by the inequalities of the ground it has to pass over in its uncertain course,

“ And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean.”

It remains to speak of the faults of Shakespear. They are not so many or so great as they have been represented; what there are, are chiefly owing to the following causes:—The universality of his genius was, perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works; the variety of his resources, sometimes diverting him from applying them to the most effectual purposes. He might be said to combine the powers of *Æschylus* and *Aristophanes*, of *Dante* and *Rabelais*, in his own mind. If he had been only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater. The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He is relaxed and careless in critical places; he is in earnest throughout only in *Timon*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear*. Again, he had no models of acknowledged excellence constantly in view to stimulate his efforts, and by all that appears, no love of fame. He wrote for the “great vulgar and the small,” in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and the maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He did not trouble himself about Voltaire’s criticisms. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things; and if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them

himself. His very facility of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill. His blunders in chronology and geography do not amount to above half a dozen, and they are offences against chronology and geography, not against poetry. As to the unities, he was right in setting them at defiance. He was fonder of puns than became so great a man. His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own. He had no objection to float down with the stream of common taste and opinion : he rose above it by his own buoyancy, and an impulse which he could not keep under, in spite of himself or others, and " his delights did shew most dolphin-like."

He had an equal genius for comedy and tragedy ; and his tragedies are better than his comedies, because tragedy is better than comedy. His female characters, which have been found fault with as insipid, are the finest in the world. Lastly, Shakespear was the least of a coxcomb of any one that ever lived, and much of a gentleman.

Lectures on the English Poets, 1818.

MACBETH

“ The poet’s eye in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven ;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.”

MACBETH and *Lear*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*, are usually reckoned Shakespear’s four principal tragedies. *Lear* stands first for the profound intensity of the passion ; MACBETH for the wildness of the imagination and the rapidity of the action ; *Othello* for the progressive interest and powerful alternations of feeling ; *Hamlet* for the refined development of thought and sentiment. If the force of genius shewn in each of these works is astonishing, their variety is not less so. They are like different creations of the same mind, not one of which has the slightest reference to the rest. This distinctness and originality is indeed the necessary consequence of truth and nature. Shakespear’s genius alone appeared to possess the resources of nature. He is “ your only *tragedy-maker*.” His plays have the force of things upon the mind. What he represents is brought home to the bosom as a part of our experience, implanted in the memory as if we had known the places, persons, and

things of which he treats. *MACBETH* is like a record of a preternatural and tragical event. It has the rugged severity of an old chronicle with all that the imagination of the poet can engraft upon traditional belief. The castle of Macbeth, round which "the air smells wooingly," and where "the temple-haunting martlet builds," has a real subsistence in the mind; the Weird Sisters meet us in person on "the blasted heath"; the "air-drawn dagger" moves slowly before our eyes; the "gracious Duncan," the "blood-boulted Banquo" stand before us; all that passed through the mind of Macbeth passes, without the loss of a tittle, through ours. All that could actually take place, and all that is only possible to be conceived, what was said and what was done, the workings of passion, the spells of magic, are brought before us with the same absolute truth and vividness. Shakespear excelled in the openings of his plays: that of *MACBETH* is the most striking of any. The wildness of the scenery, the sudden shifting of the situations and characters, the bustle, the expectations excited, are equally extraordinary. From the first entrance of the Witches and the description of them when they meet Macbeth—

—“What are these
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants of th' earth
And yet are on't?”

the mind is prepared for all that follows.

This tragedy is alike distinguished for the lofty imagination it displays, and for the tumultuous vehemence

of the action ; and the one is made the moving principle of the other. The overwhelming pressure of preternatural agency urges on the tide of human passion with redoubled force. Macbeth himself appears driven along by the violence of his fate like a vessel drifting before a storm : he reels to and fro like a drunken man ; he staggers under the weight of his own purposes and the suggestions of others ; he stands at bay with his situation ; and from the superstitious awe and breathless suspense into which the communications of the Weïrd Sisters throw him, is hurried on with daring impatience to verify their predictions, and with impious and bloody hand to tear aside the veil which hides the uncertainty of the future. He is not equal to the struggle with fate and conscience. He now “bends up each corporal instrument to the terrible feat” ; at other times his heart misgives him, and he is cowed and abashed by his success. “The deed, no less than the attempt, confounds him.” His mind is assailed by the stings of remorse, and full of “preternatural solicitings.” His speeches and soliloquies are dark riddles on human life, baffling solution, and entangling him in their labyrinths. In thought he is absent and perplexed, sudden and desperate in act, from a distrust of his own resolution. His energy springs from the anxiety and agitation of his mind. His blindly rushing forward on the objects of his ambition and revenge, or his recoiling from them, equally betrays the harassed state of his feelings. This part of his character is admirably set off by being brought in connection with that of Lady Macbeth, whose obdurate strength of will and masculine firmness

give her the ascendancy over her husband's faltering virtue. She at once seizes on the opportunity that offers for the accomplishment of all their wished-for greatness, and never flinches from her object till all is over. The magnitude of her resolution almost covers the magnitude of her guilt. She is a great bad woman, whom we hate, but whom we fear more than we hate. She does not excite our loathing and abhorrence like Regan and Gonerill. She is only wicked to gain a great end ; and is perhaps more distinguished by her commanding presence of mind and inexorable self-will, which do not suffer her to be diverted from a bad purpose, when once formed, by weak and womanly regrets, than by the hardness of her heart or want of natural affections. The impression which her lofty determination of character makes on the mind of Macbeth is well described where he exclaims—

—“ Bring forth men children only ;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males ! ”

Nor do the pains she is at to “ screw his courage to the sticking-place,” the reproach to him, not to be “ lost so poorly in himself,” the assurance that “ a little water clears them of this deed,” show anything but her greater consistency in depravity. Her strong-nerved ambition furnishes ribs of steel to “ the sides of his intent ” ; and she is herself wound up to the execution of her baneful project with the same unshrinking fortitude in crime, that in other circumstances she would probably have

shown patience in suffering. The deliberate sacrifice of all other considerations to the gaining "for their future days and nights sole sovereign sway and masterdom," by the murder of Duncan is gorgeously expressed in her invocation on hearing of "his fatal entrance under her battlements" :—

—“ Come all you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here :
And fill me, from the crown to th' toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty ; make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctionous visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murthing ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night !
And pall thee in the dunkest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heav'n peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, hold, hold ! ”—

When she first hears that "Duncan comes there to sleep" she is so overcome by the news, which is beyond her utmost expectations, that she answers the messenger, "Thou'rt mad to say it": and on receiving her husband's account of the predictions of the Witches, conscious of his instability of purpose, and that her presence is necessary to goad him on to the consummation of his promised greatness, she exclaims—

—“ Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal.”

This swelling exultation and keen spirit of triumph, this uncontrollable eagerness of anticipation, which seems to dilate her form and take possession of all her faculties, this solid, substantial flesh and blood display of passion, exhibit a striking contrast to the cold, abstracted, gratuitous, servile malignity of the Witches, who are equally instrumental in urging Macbeth to his fate for the mere love of mischief, and from a disinterested delight in deformity and cruelty. They are hags of mischief, obscene panders to iniquity, malicious from their impotence of enjoyment, enamoured of destruction, because they are themselves unreal, abortive, half-existences —who become sublime from their exemption from all human sympathies and contempt for all human affairs, as Lady Macbeth does by the force of passion ! Her fault seems to have been an excess of that strong principle of self-interest and family aggrandisement, not amenable to the common feelings of compassion and justice, which is so marked a feature in barbarous nations and times. A passing reflection of this kind, on the resemblance of the sleeping king to her father, alone prevents her from slaying Duncan with her own hand.

In speaking of the character of Lady Macbeth, we ought not to pass over Mrs. Siddons's manner of acting

that part. We can conceive of nothing grander. It was something above nature. It seemed almost as if a being of a superior order had dropped from a higher sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine ; she was tragedy personified. In coming on in the sleeping-scene, her eyes were open, but their sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered and unconscious of what she did. Her lips moved involuntarily—all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. She glided on and off the stage like an apparition. To have seen her in that character was an event in every one's life, not to be forgotten.

The dramatic beauty of the character of Duncan, which excites the respect and pity even of his murderers, has been often pointed out. It forms a picture of itself. An instance of the author's power of giving a striking effect to a common reflection, by the manner of introducing it, occurs in a speech of Duncan, complaining of his having been deceived in his opinion of the Thane of Cawdor, at the very moment that he is expressing the most unbounded confidence in the loyalty and services of Macbeth.

“ There is no art
To find the mind's construction in the face :
He was a gentleman, on whom I built
An absolute trust.
O worthiest cousin, (*addressing himself to Macbeth.*)
The sin of my ingratitude e'en now
Was great upon me,” etc.

Another passage to show that Shakespear lost sight of nothing that could in any way give relief or heightening to his subject, is the conversation which takes place between Banquo and Fleance immediately before the murder-scene of Duncan.

“ *Banquo.* How goes the night, boy ?

Fleance. The moon is down : I have not heard the clock.

Banquo. And she goes down at twelve.

Fleance. I take 't, 'tis later, Sir.

Banquo. Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heav'n,

Their candles are all out.—

A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep : Merciful Powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose.”

In like manner, a fine idea is given of the gloomy coming on of evening, just as Banquo is going to be assassinated.

“ Light thickets and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood.”

“ Now spurs the lated traveller apace
To gain the timely inn.”

MACBETH (generally speaking) is done upon a stronger and more systematic principle of contrast than any other of Shakespear's plays. It moves upon the verge of an

abyss, and is a constant struggle between life and death. The action is desperate and the reaction is dreadful. It is a huddling together of fierce extremes, a war of opposite natures which of them shall destroy the other. There is nothing but what has a violent end or violent beginnings. The lights and shades are laid on with a determined hand ; the transitions from triumph to despair, from the height of terror to the repose of death, are sudden and startling ; every passion brings in its fellow-contrary, and the thoughts pitch and jostle against each other as in the dark. The whole play is an unruly chaos of strange and forbidden things, where the ground rocks under our feet. Shakespear's genius here took its full swing, and trod upon the farthest bounds of nature and passion. This circumstance will account for the abruptness and violent antitheses of the style, the throes and labour which run through the expression, and from defects will turn them into beauties. "So fair and foul a day I have not seen," etc. "Such welcome and unwelcome news together." "Men's lives are like the flowers in their caps, dying or ere they sicken." "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it." The scene before the castle-gate follows the appearance of the Witches on the heath, and is followed by a midnight murder. Duncan is cut off betimes by treason leagued with witchcraft, and Macduff is ripped untimely from his mother's womb to avenge his death. Macbeth, after the death of Banquo, wishes for his presence in extravagant terms, "To him and all we thirst," and when his ghost appears, cries out, "Avaunt and quit my sight," and being gone, he is "himself again." Macbeth resolves to get rid of Macduff, that "he may

sleep in spite of thunder" ; and cheers his wife on the doubtful intelligence of Banquo's taking-off with the encouragement—" Then be thou jocund : ere the bat has flown his cloistered flight ; ere to black Hecate's summons the shard-born beetle has rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done—a deed of dreadful note." In Lady Macbeth's speech " Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't," there is murder and filial piety together ; and in urging him to fulfil his vengeance against the defenceless king, her thoughts spare the blood neither of infants nor old age. The description of the Witches is full of the same contradictory principle ; they " rejoice when good kings bleed," they are neither of the earth nor the air, but both ; " they should be women, but their beards forbid it" ; they take all the pains possible to lead Macbeth on to the height of his ambition, only to betray him " in deeper consequence," and after showing him all the pomp of their art, discover their malignant delight in his disappointed hopes, by that bitter taunt, " Why stands Macbeth thus amazedly ? " We might multiply such instances every where.

The leading features in the character of Macbeth are striking enough, and they form what may be thought at first only a bold, rude, Gothic outline. By comparing it with other characters of the same author we shall perceive the absolute truth and identity which is observed in the midst of the giddy whirl and rapid career of events. Macbeth in Shakespear no more loses his identity of character in the fluctuations of fortune or the storm of passion, than Macbeth in himself would have lost the

identity of his person. Thus he is as distinct a being from Richard III. as it is possible to imagine, though these two characters in common hands, and indeed in the hands of any other poet, would have been a repetition of the same general idea, more or less exaggerated. For both are tyrants, usurpers, murderers, both aspiring and ambitious, both courageous, cruel, treacherous. But Richard is cruel from nature and constitution. Macbeth becomes so from accidental circumstances. Richard is from his birth deformed in body and mind, and naturally incapable of good. Macbeth is full of "the milk of human kindness," is frank, sociable, generous. He is tempted to the commission of guilt by golden opportunities, by the instigations of his wife, and by prophetic warnings. Fate and metaphysical aid conspire against his virtue and his loyalty. Richard on the contrary needs no prompter, but wades through a series of crimes to the height of his ambition from the ungovernable violence of his temper and a reckless love of mischief. He is never gay but in the prospect or in the success of his villainies: Macbeth is full of horror at the thoughts of the murder of Duncan, which he is with difficulty prevailed on to commit, and of remorse after its perpetration. Richard has no mixture of common humanity in his composition, no regard to kindred or posterity, he owns no fellowship with others, he is "himself alone." Macbeth is not destitute of feelings of sympathy, is accessible to pity, is even made in some measure the dupe of his uxoriousness, ranks the loss of friends, of the cordial love of his followers, and of his good name, among the causes which have made him weary of life, and regrets that

he has ever seized the crown by unjust means, since he cannot transmit it to his posterity—

“ For Banquo’s issue have I fil’d my mind—
For them the gracious Duncan have I murther’d,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings.”

In the agitation of his mind, he envies those whom he has sent to peace. “ Duncan is in his grave ; after life’s fitful fever he sleeps well.”—It is true, he becomes more callous as he plunges deeper in guilt, “ direness is thus rendered familiar to his slaughterous thoughts,” and he in the end anticipates his wife in the boldness and bloodiness of his enterprises, while she for want of the same stimulus of action, “ is troubled with thick-coming fancies that rob her of her rest,” goes mad and dies. Macbeth endeavours to escape from reflection on his crimes by repelling their consequences, and banishes remorse for the past by the meditation of future mischief. This is not the principle of Richard’s cruelty, which displays the wanton malice of a fiend as much as the frailty of human passion. Macbeth is goaded on to acts of violence and retaliation by necessity ; to Richard, blood is a pastime.—There are other decisive differences inherent in the two characters. Richard may be regarded as a man of the world, a plotting, hardened knave, wholly regardless of every thing but his own ends, and the means to secure them.—Not so Macbeth. The superstitions of the age, the rude state of society, the local scenery and customs, all give a wildness and imaginary grandeur to his character. From the strangeness of the events that surround

him, he is full of amazement and fear ; and stands in doubt between the world of reality and the world of fancy. He sees sights not shown to mortal eye, and hears unearthly music. All is tumult and disorder within and without his mind ; his purposes recoil upon himself, are broken and disjointed ; he is the double thrall of his passions and his evil destiny. Richard is not a character either of imagination or pathos, but of pure self-will. There is no conflict of opposite feelings in his breast. The apparitions which he sees only haunt him in his sleep ; nor does he live like Macbeth in a waking dream. Macbeth has considerable energy and manliness of character ; but then he is “ subject to all the skyey influences.” He is sure of nothing but the present moment. Richard in the busy turbulence of his projects never loses his self-possession, and makes use of every circumstance that happens as an instrument of his long-reaching designs. In his last extremity we can only regard him as a wild beast taken in the toils : while we never entirely lose our concern for Macbeth ; and he calls back all our sympathy by that fine close of thoughtful melancholy—

“ My way of life is fallen into the sear,
The yellow leaf ; and that which should accompany old
age,
As honour, troops of friends, I must not look to have ;
But in their stead, curses not loud but deep,
Mouth-honour, breath, which the poor heart
Would fain deny, and dare not.”

We can conceive a common actor to play Richard

tolerably well ; we can conceive no one to play Macbeth properly, or to look like a man that had encountered the Weird Sisters. All the actors that we have ever seen, appear as if they had encountered them on the boards of Covent-garden or Drury-lane, but not on the heath at Fores, and as if they did not believe what they had seen. The Witches of MACBETH indeed are ridiculous on the modern stage, and we doubt if the Furies of Æschylus would be more respected. The progress of manners and knowledge has an influence on the stage, and will in time perhaps destroy both tragedy and comedy. Filch's picking pockets in the *Beggar's Opera* is not so good a jest as it used to be : by the force of the police and of philosophy, Lillo's murders and the ghosts in Shakespeare will become obsolete. At last, there will be nothing left, good nor bad, to be desired or dreaded, on the theatre or in real life.—A question has been started with respect to the originality of Shakespear's Witches, which has been well answered by Mr. Lamb in his notes to the “Specimens of Early Dramatic Poetry.”

“ Though some resemblance may be traced between the charms in MACBETH, and the incantations in this play (the Witch of Middleton), which is supposed to have preceded it, this coincidence will not detract much from the originality of Shakespear. His Witches are distinguished from the Witches of Middleton by essential differences. These are creatures to whom man or woman plotting some dire mischief might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes

first meet with Macbeth's, he is spell-bound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These Witches can hurt the body ; those have power over the soul.—Hecate in Middleton has a son, a low buffoon : the hags of Shakespear have neither child of their own, nor seem to be descended from any parent. They are foul anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy music. This is all we know of them.—Except Hecate, they have no names, which heightens their mysteriousness. The names, and some of the properties which Middleton has given to his hags, excite smiles. The Weïrd Sisters are serious things. Their presence cannot co-exist with mirth. But, in a lesser degree, the Witches of Middleton are fine creations. Their power too is, in some measure, over the mind. They raise jars, jealousies, strifes, *like a thick scurf o'er life.*"

Characters of Shakespear's Plays : Macbeth, 1817.

HAMLET

THIS is that Hamlet the Dane, whom we read of in our youth, and whom we may be said almost to remember in our after-years ; he who made that famous soliloquy on life, who gave the advice to the players, who thought “ this goodly frame, the earth, a steril promontory, and this brave o'er-hanging firmament, the air, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours ” ; whom “ man delighted not, nor woman neither ” ; he who talked with the grave-diggers, and moralised on Yorick’s skull ; the school-fellow of Rosencraus and Guildenstern at Wittenberg ; the friend of Horatio ; the lover of Ophelia ; he that was mad and sent to England ; the slow avenger of his father’s death ; who lived at the court of Horwendillus five hundred years before we were born, but all whose thoughts we seem to know as well as we do our own, because we have read them in Shakespear.

Hamlet is a name ; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet’s brain. What then, are they not real ? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader’s mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet. This play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others ; whoever has borne about with him the clouded brow of

reflection, and thought himself “ too much i’ th’ sun ” ; whoever has seen the golden lamp of day dimmed by envious mists rising in his own breast, and could find in the world before him only a dull blank with nothing left remarkable in it ; whoever has known “ the pangs of despised love, the insolence of office, or the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes ” ; he who has felt his mind sink within him, and sadness cling to his heart like a malady, who has had his hopes blighted and his youth staggered by the apparitions of strange things ; who cannot be well at ease, while he sees evil hovering near him like a spectre ; whose powers of action have been eaten up by thought, he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing ; whose bitterness of soul makes him careless of consequences, and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock representation of them—this is the true Hamlet.

We have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces. But we must make such observations as we can. It is the one of Shakespear’s plays that we think of the oftenest, because it abounds most in striking reflections on human life, and because the distresses of Hamlet are transferred, by the turn of his mind, to the general account of humanity. Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves, because he applies it so himself as a means of general reasoning. He is a great moraliser ; and what makes him worth attending to is, that he moralises on his own feelings and experience. He is not a common-place pedant. If *Lear* is distin-

guished by the greatest depth of passion, HAMLET is the most remarkable for the ingenuity, originality, and unstudied development of character. Shakespear had more magnanimity than any other poet, and he has shewn more of it in this play than in any other. There is no attempt to force an interest: every thing is left for time and circumstances to unfold. The attention is excited without effort, the incidents succeed each other as matters of course, the characters think and speak and act just as they might do, if left entirely to themselves. There is no set purpose, no straining at a point. The observations are suggested by the passing scene—the gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. The whole play is an exact transcript of what might be supposed to have taken place at the court of Denmark, at the remote period of time fixed upon, before the modern refinements in morals and manners were heard of. It would have been interesting enough to have been admitted as a by-stander in such a scene, at such a time, to have heard and witnessed something of what was going on. But here we are more than spectators. We have not only “the outward pageants and the signs of grief”; but “we have that within which passes shew.” We read the thoughts of the heart, we catch the passions living as they rise. Other dramatic writers give us very fine versions and paraphrases of nature; but Shakespear, together with his own comments, gives us the original text, that we may judge for ourselves. This is a very great advantage.

The character of Hamlet stands quite by itself. It is not a character marked by strength of will or even of

passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be: but he is a young and princely novice, full of high enthusiasm and quick sensibility—the sport of circumstances, questioning with fortune and refining on his own feelings, and forced from the natural bias of his disposition by the strangeness of his situation. He seems incapable of deliberate action, and is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion, when he has no time to reflect, as in the scene where he kills Polonius, and again, where he alters the letters which Rosencraus and Guildenstern are taking with them to England, purporting his death. At other times, when he is most bound to act, he remains puzzled, undecided, and sceptical, dallies with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and finds out some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtlessness again. For this reason he refuses to kill the King when he is at his prayers, and by a refinement in malice, which is in truth only an excuse for his own want of resolution, defers his revenge to a more fatal opportunity, when he shall be engaged in some act “ that has no relish of salvation in it.”

“ He kneels and prays,
And now I’ll do ’t, and so he goes to heaven,
And so am I reveng’d ; *that would be scann’d*.
He kill’d my father, and for that,
I, his sole son, sent him to heaven.
Why this is reward, not revenge.
Up sword and know thou a more horrid time,
When he is drunk, asleep, or in a rage.”

He is the prince of philosophical speculators ; and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea his wish can form, he declines it altogether. So he scruples to trust the suggestions of the ghost, contrives the scene of the play to have surer proof of his uncle's guilt, and then rests satisfied with this confirmation of his suspicions, and the success of his experiment, instead of acting upon it. Yet he is sensible of his own weakness, taxes himself with it, and tries to reason himself out of it.

“ How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge ! What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed ? A beast ; no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To rust in us unus'd. Now whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on th' event,—
A thought which quarter'd, hath but one part wis-
dom,
And ever three parts coward ;—I do not know
Why yet I live to say, this thing 's to do ;
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do it. Examples gross as earth exhort me :
Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,

Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. 'Tis not to be great
Never to stir without great argument ;
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep, while to my shame I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain ?—O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth."

Still he does nothing ; and this very speculation on his own infirmity only affords him another occasion for indulging it. It is not from any want of attachment to his father or of abhorrence of his murder that Hamlet is thus dilatory, but it is more to his taste to indulge his imagination in reflecting upon the enormity of the crime and refining on his schemes of vengeance, than to put them into immediate practice. His ruling passion is to think, not to act : and any vague pretext that flatters this propensity instantly diverts him from his previous purposes.

The moral perfection of this character has been called in question, we think, by those who did not understand it. It is more interesting than according to rules ;

amiable, though not faultless. The ethical delineations of "that noble and liberal casuist" (as Shakespear has been well called) do not exhibit the drab-coloured quakerism of morality. His plays are not copied either from *The Whole Duty of Man*, or from *The Academy of Compliments*! We confess we are a little shocked at the want of refinement in those who are shocked at the want of refinement in *Hamlet*. The neglect of punctilious exactness in his behaviour either partakes of the "licence of the time," or else belongs to the very excess of intellectual refinement in the character, which makes the common rules of life, as well as his own purposes, sit loose upon him. He may be said to be amenable only to the tribunal of his own thoughts, and is too much taken up with the airy world of contemplation to lay as much stress as he ought on the practical consequences of things. His habitual principles of action are unhinged and out of joint with the time. His conduct to Ophelia is quite natural in his circumstances. It is that of assumed severity only. It is the effect of disappointed hope, of bitter regrets, of affection suspended, not obliterated, by the distractions of the scene around him! Amidst the natural and preternatural horrors of his situation, he might be excused in delicacy from carrying on a regular courtship. When "his father's spirit was in arms," it was not a time for the son to make love in. He could neither marry Ophelia, nor wound her mind by explaining the cause of his alienation, which he durst hardly trust himself to think of. It would have taken him years to have come to a direct explanation on the point. In the harassed state of his mind, he could not

have done much otherwise than he did. His conduct does not contradict what he says when he sees her funeral,

“ I loved Ophelia : forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum.”

Nothing can be more affecting or beautiful than the Queen's apostrophe to Ophelia on throwing the flowers into the grave.

—“ Sweets to the sweet, farewell.
I hop'd thou should'st have been my Hamlet's wife :
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy grave.”

Shakespear was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of human character, and he here shews us the Queen, who was so criminal in some respects, not without sensibility and affection in other relations of life.—Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. Oh rose of May, oh flower too soon faded ! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakespear could have drawn in the way that he has done, and to the conception of which there is not even the smallest approach, except in some of the old romantic ballads.* Her brother,

* In the account of her death, a friend has pointed out an instance of the poet's exact observation of nature :—

“ There is a willow growing o'er a brook,
That shews its hoary leaves i' th' glassy stream.”

The inside of the leaves of the willow, next the water, is of a whitish colour, and the reflection would therefore be “ hoary.”

Laertes, is a character we do not like so well : he is too hot and choleric, and somewhat rhodomontade. Polonius is a perfect character in its kind ; nor is there any foundation for the objections which have been made to the consistency of this part. It is said that he acts very foolishly and talks very sensibly. There is no inconsistency in that. Again, that he talks wisely at one time and foolishly at another ; that his advice to Laertes is very excellent, and his advice to the King and Queen on the subject of Hamlet's madness very ridiculous. But he gives the one as a father, and is sincere in it ; he gives the other as a mere courtier, a busy-body, and is accordingly officious, garrulous, and impertinent. In short, Shakespear has been accused of inconsistency in this and other characters, only because he has kept up the distinction which there is in nature, between the understandings and the moral habits of men, between the absurdity of their ideas and the absurdity of their motives. Polonius is not a fool, but he makes himself so. His folly, whether in his actions or speeches, comes under the head of impropriety of intention.

We do not like to see our author's plays acted, and least of all, *HAMLET*. There is no play that suffers so much in being acted. Mr. Kemble unavoidably fails in this character from a want of ease and variety. The character of Hamlet is made up of undulating lines ; it has the yielding flexibility of "a wave o' th' sea." Mr. Kemble plays it like a man in armour, with a determined inveteracy of purpose, in one undeviating straight line, which is as remote from the natural grace and refined susceptibility of the character, as the sharp angles and

abrupt starts which Mr. Kean introduces into the part. Mr. Kean's Hamlet is as much too sanguine and rash as Mr. Kemble's is too deliberate and formal. His manner is too strong and pointed. He throws a severity, approaching to virulence, into the common observations and answers. There is nothing of this in Hamlet. He is, as it were, wrapped up in his reflections, and only *thinks aloud*. There should therefore be no attempt to impress what he says upon others by a studied exaggeration of emphasis or manner; no *talking at* his hearers. There should be as much of the gentleman and scholar as possible infused into the part, and as little of the actor. A pensive air of sadness should sit reluctantly upon his brow, but no appearance of fixed and sullen gloom. He is full of weakness and melancholy, but there is no harshness in his nature. He is the most amiable of misanthropes.

Characters of Shakespear's Plays: Hamlet, 1817.

HENRY IV

IN TWO PARTS

IF Shakespear's fondness for the ludicrous sometimes led to faults in his tragedies (which was not often the case) he has made us amends by the character of Falstaff. This is perhaps the most substantial comic character that ever was invented. Sir John carries a most portly presence in the mind's eye ; and in him, not to speak it profanely, "we behold the fulness of the spirit of wit and humour bodily." We are as well acquainted with his person as his mind, and his jokes come upon us with double force and relish from the quantity of flesh through which they make their way, as he shakes his fat sides with laughter, or " lards the lean earth as he walks along." Other comic characters seem, if we approach and handle them, to resolve themselves into air, " into thin air " ; but this is embodied and palpable to the grossest apprehension : it lies " three fingers deep upon the ribs," it plays about the lungs and the diaphragm with all the force of animal enjoyment. His body is like a good estate to his mind, from which he receives rents and revenues of profit and pleasure in kind, according to its extent, and the richness of the soil. Wit is often a meagre substitute for pleasure

able sensation ; an effusion of spleen and petty spite at the comforts of others, from feeling none in itself. Falstaff's wit is an emanation of a fine constitution ; an exuberance of good-humour and good-nature ; an overflowing of his love of laughter and good-fellowship ; a giving vent to his heart's ease, and over-contentment with himself and others. He would not be in character, if he were not so fat as he is ; for there is the greatest keeping in the boundless luxury of his imagination and the pampered self-indulgence of his physical appetites. He manures and nourishes his mind with jests, as he does his body with sack and sugar. He carves out his jokes, as he would a capon or a haunch of venison, where there is *cut and come again* ; and pours out upon them the oil of gladness. His tongue drops fatness, and in the chambers of his brain "it snows of meat and drink." He keeps up perpetual holiday and open house, and we live with him in a round of invitations to a rump and dozen.—Yet we are not to suppose that he was a mere sensualist. All this is as much in imagination as in reality. His sensuality does not engross and stupify his other faculties, but "ascends me into the brain, clears away all the dull, crude vapours that environ it, and makes it full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes." His imagination keeps up the ball after his senses have done with it. He seems to have even a greater enjoyment of the freedom from restraint, of good cheer, of his ease, of his vanity, in the ideal exaggerated description which he gives of them, than in fact. He never fails to enrich his discourse with allusions to eating and drinking, but we never see him at table. He carries his own larder

about with him, and he is himself “a tun of man.” His pulling out the bottle in the field of battle is a joke to shew his contempt for glory accompanied with danger, his systematic adherence to his Epicurean philosophy in the most trying circumstances. Again, such is his deliberate exaggeration of his own vices, that it does not seem quite certain whether the account of his hostess’s bill, found in his pocket, with such an out-of-the-way charge for capons and sack with only one halfpenny-worth of bread, was not put there by himself as a trick to humour the jest upon his favourite propensities, and as a conscious caricature of himself. He is represented as a liar, a braggart, a coward, a glutton, etc., and yet we are not offended but delighted with him ; for he is all these as much to amuse others as to gratify himself. He openly assumes all these characters to shew the humorous part of them. The unrestrained indulgence of his own ease, appetites, and convenience, has neither malice nor hypocrisy in it. In a word, he is an actor in himself almost as much as upon the stage, and we no more object to the character of Falstaff in a moral point of view than we should think of bringing an excellent comedian, who should represent him to the life, before one of the police offices. We only consider the number of pleasant lights in which he puts certain foibles (the more pleasant as they are opposed to the received rules and necessary restraints of society) and do not trouble ourselves about the consequences resulting from them, for no mischievous consequences do result. Sir John is old as well as fat, which gives a melancholy retrospective tinge to the character ; and by the disparity between his inclinations

and his capacity for enjoyment, makes it still more ludicrous and fantastical.

The secret of Falstaff's wit is for the most part a masterly presence of mind, an absolute self-possession, which nothing can disturb. His repartees are involuntary suggestions of his self-love ; instinctive evasions of every thing that threatens to interrupt the career of his triumphant jollity and self-complacency. His very size floats him out of all his difficulties in a sea of rich conceits ; and he turns round on the pivot of his convenience, with every occasion and at a moment's warning. His natural repugnance to every unpleasant thought or circumstance, of itself makes light of objections, and provokes the most extravagant and licentious answers in his own justification. His indifference to truth puts no check upon his invention, and the more improbable and unexpected his contrivances are, the more happily does he seem to be delivered of them, the anticipation of their effect acting as a stimulus to the gaiety of his fancy. The success of one adventurous sally gives him spirits to undertake another : he deals always in round numbers, and his exaggerations and excuses are “open, palpable, monstrous as the father that begets them.” His dissolute carelessness of what he says discovers itself in the first dialogue with the Prince.

“ *Falstaff*. By the lord, thou say'st true, lad ; and is not mine hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench ?

P. Henry. As the honey of Hibla, my old lad of the castle ; and is not a buff-jerkin a most sweet robe of durance ?

Falstaff. How now, how now, mad wag, what in thy

quips and thy quiddities ? what a plague have I to do with a buff-jerkin ?

P. Henry. Why, what a pox have I to do with mine hostess of the tavern ? ”

In the same scene he afterwards affects melancholy, from pure satisfaction of heart, and professes reform, because it is the farthest thing in the world from his thoughts. He has no qualms of conscience, and therefore would as soon talk of them as of anything else when the humour takes him.

“ *Falstaff.* But, Hal, I pr'ythee trouble me no more with vanity. I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought : an old lord of council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir ; but I mark'd him not, and yet he talked very wisely, and in the street too.

P. Henry. Thou didst well, for wisdom cries out in the street, and no man regards it.

Falstaff. O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm unto me, Hal ; God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing, and now I am, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over, by the lord ; an I do not, I am a villain. I'll be damn'd for never a king's son in Christendom.

P. Henry. Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack ?

Falstaff. Where thou wilt, lad, I'll make one ; an I do not, call me villain, and baffle me.

P. Henry. I see good amendment of life in thee, from praying to purse-taking.

Falstaff. Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation."

Of the other prominent passages, his account of his pretended resistance to the robbers, " who grew from four men in buckram into eleven " as the imagination of his own valour increased with his relating it, his getting off when the truth is discovered by pretending he knew the Prince, the scene in which in the person of the old king he lectures the prince and gives himself a good character, the soliloquy on honour, and description of his new-raised recruits, his meeting with the chief justice, his abuse of the Prince and Poins, who overhear him, to Doll Tearsheet, his reconciliation with Mrs. Quickly who has arrested him for an old debt, and whom he persuades to pawn her plate to lend him ten pounds more, and the scenes with Shallow and Silence, are all inimitable. Of all of them, the scene in which Falstaff plays the part, first, of the King, and then of Prince Henry, is the one that has been the most often quoted. We must quote it once more in illustration of our remarks.

" *Falstaff.* Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied : for though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my son, I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion ; but chiefly, a villainous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging

of thy nether lip, that doth warrant me. If then thou be son to me, here lies the point ;—Why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at ? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher, and eat blackberries ? A question not to be ask'd. Shall the son of England prove a thief, and take purses ? a question not to be ask'd. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch : this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile ; so doth the company thou keepest : for, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears ; not in pleasure, but in passion ; not in words only, but in woes also :—and yet there is a virtuous man, whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name.

P. Henry. What manner of man, an it like your majesty ?

Falstaff. A goodly portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent ; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage ; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or, by'r-lady, iclining to threescore ; and now I do remember me, his name is Falstaff : if that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me ; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If then the fruit may be known by the tree, as the tree by the fruit, then peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff : him keep with, the rest banish. And tell me now, thou naughty varlet, tell me, where hast thou been this month ?

P. Henry. Dost thou speak like a king ? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father.

Falstaff. Depose me ? if thou dost it half so gravely,

so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker, or a poultorer's hare.

P. Henry. Well, here I am set.

Falstaff. And here I stand :—judge, my masters.

P. Henry. Now, Harry, whence come you ?

Falstaff. My noble lord, from Eastcheap.

P. Henry. The complaints I hear of thee are grievous.

Falstaff. S'blood, my lord, they are false :—nay, I'll tickle ye for a young prince, i'faith.

P. Henry. Swearest thou, ungracious boy ? henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace : there is a devil haunts thee, in the likeness of a fat old man ; a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoln parcel of drop-sies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuft cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manning-tree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years ? wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it ? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and eat it ? wherein cunning, but in craft ? wherein crafty, but in villainy ? wherein villainous, but in all things ? wherein worthy, but in nothing ?

Falstaff. I would, your grace would take me with you ; whom means your grace ?

P. Henry. That villainous, abominable mis-leader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

Falstaff. My lord, the man I know.

P. Henry. I know thou dost.

Falstaff. But to say, I know more harm in him than

in myself, were to say more than I know. That he is old (the more the pity) his white hairs do witness it : but that he is (saving your reverence) a whore-master, that I utterly deny. If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked ! if to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned : if to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved. No, my good lord ; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins : but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant ! being as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company ; banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.

P. Henry. I do, I will.

[*Knocking ; and Hostess and Bardolph go out.*

Re-enter BARDOLPH, running.

Bardolph. O, my lord, my lord ; the sheriff, with a most monstrous watch, is at the door.

Falstaff. Out, you rogue ! play out the play : I have much to say in the behalf of that Falstaff."

One of the most characteristic descriptions of Sir John is that which Mrs. Quickly gives of him when he asks her " What is the gross sum that I owe thee ? "

" *Hostess.* Marry, if thou wert an honest man, thyself, and the money too. Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin-chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire on Wednesday in Whitsun-week, when the prince broke thy head for likening his father to a singing man of Windsor : thou didst swear

to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not goodwife Keech, the butcher's wife, come in then, and call me gossip Quickly? coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar; telling us, she had a good dish of prawns; whereby thou didst desire to eat some; whereby I told thee, they were ill for a green wound? And didst thou not, when she was gone down stairs, desire me to be no more so familiarity with such poor people; saying, that ere long they should call me madam? And didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings? I put thee now to thy book-oath; deny it, if thou canst."

This scene is to us the most convincing proof of Falstaff's power of gaining over the good will of those he was familiar with, except indeed Bardolph's somewhat profane exclamation on hearing the account of his death, "Would I were with him, wheresoe'er he is, whether in heaven or hell."

One of the topics of exulting superiority over others most common in Sir John's mouth is his corpulence and the exterior marks of good living which he carries about him, thus "turning his vices into commodity." He accounts for the friendship between the Prince and Poins, from "their legs being both of a bigness"; and compares Justice Shallow to "a man made after supper of a cheese-paring." There cannot be a more striking gradation of character than that between Falstaff and Shallow, and Shallow and Silence. It seems difficult at first to fall lower than the squire; but this fool, great

as he is, finds an admirer and humble foil in his cousin Silence. Vain of his acquaintance with Sir John, who makes a butt of him, he exclaims, "Would, cousin Silence, that thou had'st seen that which this knight and I have seen!"—"Aye, Master Shallow, we have heard the chimes at midnight," says Sir John. To Falstaff's observation "I did not think Master Silence had been a man of this mettle," Silence answers, "Who, I? I have been merry twice and once ere now." What an idea is here conveyed of a prodigality of living! What good husbandry and economical self-denial in his pleasures! What a stock of lively recollections! It is curious that Shakespear has ridiculed in Justice Shallow, who was "in some authority under the king," that disposition to unmeaning tautology which is the regal infirmity of later times, and which, it may be supposed, he acquired from talking to his cousin Silence, and receiving no answers.

"Falstaff. You have here a goodly dwelling, and a rich.
Shallow. Barren, barren, barren; beggars all, beggars all, Sir John: marry, good sir. Spread Davy, spread Davy. Well said, Davy.

Falstaff. This Davy serves you for good uses.
Shallow. A good varlet, a good varlet, a very good varlet. By the mass, I have drunk too much sack at supper. A good varlet. Now sit down, now sit down. Come, cousin."

The true spirit of humanity, the thorough knowledge of the stuff we are made of, the practical wisdom with the seeming fooleries in the whole of the garden-scene

at Shallow's country-seat, and just before in the exquisite dialogue between him and Silence on the death of old Double, have no parallel any where else. In one point of view, they are laughable in the extreme; in another they are equally affecting, if it is affecting to shew *what a little thing is human life*, what a poor forked creature man is!

The heroic and serious part of these two plays founded on the story of Henry IV. is not inferior to the comic and farcical. The characters of Hotspur and Prince Henry are two of the most beautiful and dramatic, both in themselves and from contrast, that ever were drawn. They are the essence of chivalry. We like Hotspur the best upon the whole, perhaps because he was unfortunate. —The characters of their fathers, Henry IV. and old Northumberland, are kept up equally well. Henry naturally succeeds by his prudence and caution in keeping what he has got; Northumberland fails in his enterprise from an excess of the same quality, and is caught in the web of his own cold, dilatory policy. Owen Glendower is a masterly character. It is as bold and original as it is intelligible and thoroughly natural. The disputes between him and Hotspur are managed with infinite address and insight into nature. We cannot help pointing out here some very beautiful lines, where Hotspur describes the fight between Glendower and Mortimer.

—“ When on the gentle Severn's sedgy bank,
In single opposition hand to hand,
He did confound the best part of an hour
In changing hardiment with great Glendower :

Three times they breath'd, and three times did they drink,

Upon agreement, of swift Severn's flood ;
Who then affrighted with their bloody looks,
Ran fearfully among the trembling reeds,
And hid his crisp head in the hollow bank,
Blood-stained with these valiant combatants."

The peculiarity and the excellence of Shakespear's poetry is, that it seems as if he made his imagination the hand-maid of nature, and nature the plaything of his imagination. He appears to have been all the characters, and in all the situations he describes. It is as if either he had had all their feelings, or had lent them all his genius to express themselves. There cannot be stronger instances of this than Hotspur's rage when Henry IV. forbids him to speak of Mortimer, his insensibility to all that his father and uncle urge to calm him, and his fine abstracted apostrophe to honour, "By heaven methinks it were an easy leap to pluck bright honour from the moon," etc. After all, notwithstanding the gallantry, generosity, good temper, and idle freaks of the mad-cap Prince of Wales, we should not have been sorry, if Northumberland's force had come up in time to decide the fate of the battle at Shrewsbury ; at least, we always heartily sympathise with Lady Percy's grief, when she exclaims,

" Had my sweet Harry had but half their numbers,
To-day might I (hanging on Hotspur's neck)
Have talked of Monmouth's grave."

The truth is, that we never could forgive the Prince's treatment of Falstaff; though perhaps Shakespear knew what was best, according to the history, the nature of the times, and of the man. We speak only as dramatic critics. Whatever terror the French in those days might have of Henry V. yet, to the readers of poetry at present, Falstaff is the better man of the two. We think of him and quote him oftener.

Characters of Shakespear's Plays : Henry IV, 1817.

ON THE PLEASURE OF PAINTING

“THERE is a pleasure in painting which none but painters know.” In writing, you have to contend with the world ; in painting, you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature. You sit down to your task, and are happy. From the moment that you take up the pencil, and look Nature in the face, you are at peace with your own heart. No angry passions rise to disturb the silent progress of the work, to shake the hand, or dim the brow : no irritable humours are set afloat : you have no absurd opinions to combat, no point to strain, no adversary to crush, no fool to annoy—you are actuated by fear or favour to no man. There is “no juggling here,” no sophistry, no intrigue, no tampering with the evidence, no attempt to make black white, or white black : but you resign yourself into the hands of a greater power, that of Nature, with the simplicity of a child, and the devotion of an enthusiast—“study with joy her manner, and with rapture taste her style.” The mind is calm, and full at the same time. The hand and eye are equally employed. In tracing the commonest object, a plant or the stump of a tree, you learn something every moment. You perceive unexpected differences, and discover likenesses where you looked for no such thing. You try to set down what you see—find out your error, and

correct it. You need not play tricks, or purposely mistake: with all your pains, you are still far short of the mark. Patience grows out of the endless pursuit, and turns it into a luxury. A streak in a flower, a wrinkle in a leaf, a tinge in a cloud, a stain in an old wall or ruin grey, are seized with avidity as the *spolia opima* of this sort of mental warfare, and furnish out labour for another half day. The hours pass away untold, without chagrin, and without weariness; nor would you ever wish to pass them otherwise. Innocence is joined with industry, pleasure with business; and the mind is satisfied, though it is not engaged in thinking or in doing any mischief.*

I have not much pleasure in writing these Essays, or in reading them afterwards; though I own I now and then meet with a phrase that I like, or a thought that strikes me as a true one. But after I begin them, I am only anxious to get to the end of them, which I am not sure I shall do, for I seldom see my way a page or even a sentence beforehand; and when I have as by a miracle escaped, I trouble myself little more about

* There is a passage in Werter which contains a very pleasing illustration of this doctrine, and is as follows:

“ About a league from the town is a place called Walheim. It is very agreeably situated on the side of a hill; from one of the paths which leads out of the village, you have a view of the whole country; and there is a good old woman who sells wine, coffee, and tea there: but better than all this are two lime-trees before the church, which spread their branches over a little green, surrounded by barns and cottages. I have seen few places more retired and peaceful. I send for a chair and table from the old woman’s, and there I drink my coffee and read Homer. It was by accident that I discovered this place one fine afternoon: all was perfect stillness; every body was in the fields, except a little boy about four years old, who was sitting on the ground, and holding between his knees a child of about six months; he pressed it to his bosom

them. I sometimes have to write them twice over: then it is necessary to read the *proof*, to prevent mistakes by the printer; so that by the time they appear in a tangible shape, and one can con them over with a conscious, sidelong glance to the public approbation, they have lost their gloss and relish, and become "more tedious than a twice-told tale." For a person to read his own works over with any great delight, he ought first to forget that he ever wrote them. Familiarity naturally breeds contempt. It is, in fact, like poring fondly over a piece of blank paper: from repetition, the words convey no distinct meaning to the mind, are mere idle sounds, except that our vanity claims an interest and property in them. I have more satisfaction in my own thoughts than in dictating them to others: words are necessary to explain the impression of certain things upon me to the reader, but they rather weaken and draw a veil over than strengthen it to myself. However, I might say with the poet, " My mind to me a kingdom is," yet I have little ambition " to set a throne or chair of state in the understandings of other men." The ideas

with his little arms, which made a sort of great chair for it, and notwithstanding the vivacity which sparkled in his eyes, he sat perfectly still. Quite delighted with the scene, I sat down on a plough opposite, and had great pleasure in drawing this little picture of brotherly tenderness. I added a bit of the hedge, the barn-door, and some broken cart-wheels, without any order, just as they happened to lie; and in about an hour I found I had made a drawing of great expression and very correct design, without having put in any thing of my own. This confirmed me in the resolution I had made before, only to copy nature for the future. Nature is inexhaustible, and alone forms the greatest masters. Say what you will of rules, they alter the true features, and the natural expression." Page 15.

we cherish most, exist best in a kind of shadowy abstraction,

“ Pure in the last recesses of the mind ; ”

and derive neither force nor interest from being exposed to public view. They are old familiar acquaintance, and any change in them, arising from the adventitious ornaments of style or dress, is little to their advantage. After I have once written on a subject, it goes out of my mind : my feelings about it have been melted down into words, and *them* I forget. I have, as it were, discharged my memory of its old habitual reckoning, and rubbed out the score of real sentiment. For the future, it exists only for the sake of others.—But I cannot say, from my own experience, that the same process takes place in transferring our ideas to canvas ; they gain more than they lose in the mechanical transformation. One is never tired of painting, because you have to set down not what you knew already, but what you have just discovered. In the former case, you translate feelings into words ; in the latter, names into things. There is a continual creation out of nothing going on. With every stroke of the brush, a new field of inquiry is laid open ; new difficulties arise, and new triumphs are prepared over them. By comparing the imitation with the original, you see what you have done, and how much you have still to do. The test of the senses is severer than that of fancy, and an over-match even for the delusions of our self-love. One part of a picture shames another, and you determine to paint up to yourself, if you cannot come up to nature. Every object becomes

lustrous from the light thrown back upon it by the mirror of art: and by the aid of the pencil we may be said to touch and handle the objects of sight. The air-drawn visions that hover on the verge of existence have a bodily presence given them on the canvas: the form of beauty is changed into a substance: the dream and the glory of the universe is made " palpable to feeling as to sight."—And see! a rainbow starts from the canvas, with all its humid train of glory, as if it were drawn from its cloudy arch in heaven. The spangled landscape glitters with drops of dew after the shower. The " fleecy fools " show their coats in the gleams of the setting sun. The shepherds pipe their farewell notes in the fresh evening air. And is this bright vision made from a dead dull blank, like a bubble reflecting the mighty fabric of the universe? Who would think this miracle of Rubens' pencil possible to be performed? Who, having seen it, would not spend his life to do the like? See how the rich fallows, the bare stubble-field, the scanty harvest-home, drag in Rembrandt's landscapes! How often have I looked at them and nature, and tried to do the same, till the very " light thickened," and there was an earthiness in the feeling of the air? There is no end of the refinements of art and nature in this respect. One may look at the misty glimmering horizon till the eye dazzles and the imagination is lost, in hopes to transfer the whole interminable expanse at one blow upon canvas. Wilson said he used to try to paint the effect of the motes dancing in the setting sun. At another time, a friend coming into his painting-room when he was sitting on the ground in a melancholy posture, observed that his

picture looked like a landscape after a shower : he started up with the greatest delight, and said, " That is the effect I intended to produce, but thought I had failed." Wilson was neglected ; and, by degrees, neglected his art to apply himself to brandy. His hand became unsteady, so that it was only by repeated attempts that he could reach the place, or produce the effect he aimed at ; and when he had done a little to a picture, he would say to any acquaintance who chanced to drop in, " I have painted enough for one day : come, let us go somewhere." It was not so Claude left his pictures, or his studies on the banks of the Tiber, to go in search of other enjoyments, or ceased to gaze upon the glittering sunny vales and distant hills ; and while his eye drank in the clear sparkling hues and lovely forms of nature, his hand stamped them on the lucid canvas to last there for ever ! —One of the most delightful parts of my life was one fine summer, when I used to walk out of an evening to catch the last light of the sun, gemming the green slopes or russet lawns, and gilding tower or tree, while the blue sky gradually turning to purple and gold, or skirted with dusky grey, hung its broad marble pavement over all, as we see it in the great master of Italian landscape. But to come to a more particular explanation of the subject.

The first head I ever tried to paint was an old woman with the upper part of the face shaded by her bonnet, and I certainly laboured it with great perseverance. It took me numberless sittings to do it. I have it by me still, and sometimes look at it with surprise, to think how much pains were thrown away to little purpose,—

yet not altogether in vain if it taught me to see good in every thing, and to know that there is nothing vulgar in nature seen with the eye of science or of true art. Refinement creates beauty everywhere : it is the grossness of the spectator that discovers nothing but grossness in the object. Be this as it may, I spared no pains to do my best. If art was long, I thought that life was so too at that moment. I got in the general effect the first day ; and pleased and surprised enough I was at my success. The rest was a work of time—of weeks and months (if need were) of patient toil and careful finishing. I had seen an old head by Rembrandt at Burleigh-House, and if I could produce a head at all like Rembrandt in a year, in my life-time, it would be glory and felicity, and wealth and fame enough for me ! The head I had seen at Burleigh was an exact and wonderful fac-simile of nature, and I resolved to make mine (as nearly as I could) an exact fac-simile of nature. I did not then, nor do I now believe, with Sir Joshua, that the perfection of art consists in giving general appearances without individual details, but in giving general appearances with individual details. Otherwise, I had done my work the first day. But I saw something more in nature than general effect, and I thought it worth my while to give it in the picture. There was a gorgeous effect of light and shade : but there was a delicacy as well as depth in the *chiaro scuro*, which I was bound to follow into all its dim and scarce perceptible variety of tone and shadow. Then I had to make the transition from a strong light to as dark a shade, preserving the masses, but gradually softening off the intermediate

parts. It was so in nature : the difficulty was to make it so in the copy. I tried, and failed again and again ; I strove harder, and succeeded as I thought. The wrinkles in Rembrandt were not hard lines ; but broken and irregular. I saw the same appearance in nature, and strained every nerve to give it. If I could hit off this edgy appearance, and insert the reflected light in the furrows of old age in half a morning, I did not think I had lost a day. Beneath the shrivelled yellow parchment look of the skin, there was here and there a streak of the blood colour tinging the face ; this I made a point of conveying, and did not cease to compare what I saw with what I did (with jealous lynx-eyed watchfulness) till I succeeded to the best of my ability and judgment. How many revisions were there ! How many attempts to catch an expression which I had seen the day before ! How often did we try to get the old position, and wait for the return of the same light ! There was a puckering up of the lips, a cautious introversion of the eye under the shadow of the bonnet, indicative of the feebleness and suspicion of old age, which at last we managed, after many trials and some quarrels, to a tolerable nicety. The picture was never finished, and I might have gone on with it to the present hour.* I used to set it on the ground when my day's work was done, and saw revealed to me with swimming eyes the birth of new hopes, and of a new world of objects. The painter thus learns to look at nature with different eyes.

* It is at present covered with a thick slough of oil and varnish (the perishable vehicle of the English school) like an envelope of gold-beaters' skin, so as to be hardly visible.

He before saw her “as in a glass darkly, but now face to face.” He understands the texture and meaning of the visible universe, and “sees into the life of things,” not by the help of mechanical instruments, but of the improved exercise of his faculties, and an intimate sympathy with nature. The meanest thing is not lost upon him, for he looks at it with an eye to itself, not merely to his own vanity or interest, or the opinion of the world. Even where there is neither beauty nor use—if that ever were—still there is truth, and a sufficient source of gratification in the indulgence of curiosity and activity of mind. The humblest painter is a true scholar; and the best of scholars—the scholar of nature. For myself, and for the real comfort and satisfaction of the thing, I had rather have been Jan Steen, or Gerard Dow, than the greatest casuist or philologer that ever lived. The painter does not view things in clouds or “mist, the common gloss of theologians,” but applies the same standard of truth and disinterested spirit of inquiry, that influence his daily practice, to other subjects. He perceives form, he distinguishes character. He reads men and books with an intuitive eye. He is a critic as well as a connoisseur. The conclusions he draws are clear and convincing, because they are taken from the things themselves. He is not a fanatic, a dupe, or a slave: for the habit of seeing for himself also disposes him to judge for himself. The most sensible men I know (taken as a class) are painters; that is, they are the most lively observers of what passes in the world about them, and the closest observers of what passes in their own minds. From their profession they in general mix more

with the world than authors ; and if they have not the same fund of acquired knowledge, are obliged to rely more on individual sagacity. I might mention the names of Opie, Fuseli, Northcote, as persons distinguished for striking description and acquaintance with the subtle traits of character.* Painters in ordinary society, or in obscure situations where their value is not known, and they are treated with neglect and indifference, have sometimes a forward self-sufficiency of manner : but this is not so much their fault as that of others. Perhaps their want of regular education may also be in fault in such cases. Richardson, who is very tenacious of the respect in which the profession ought to be held, tells a story of Michael Angelo, that after a quarrel between him and Pope Julius II. " upon account of a slight the artist conceived the pontiff had put upon him, Michael Angelo was introduced by a bishop, who, thinking to serve the artist by it, made it an argument that the Pope should be reconciled to him, because men of his profession were commonly ignorant, and of no consequence otherwise : his holiness, enraged at the bishop, struck him with his staff, and told him, it was he that was the block-head, and affronted the man himself would not offend ; the prelate was driven out of the chamber, and Michael Angelo had the Pope's benediction accompanied with

* Men of business, who are answerable with their fortunes for the consequences of their opinions, and are therefore accustomed to ascertain pretty accurately the grounds on which they act, before they commit themselves on the event, are often men of remarkably quick and sound judgments. Artists in like manner must know tolerably well what they are about, before they can bring the result of their observations to the test of ocular demonstration.

presents. This bishop had fallen into the vulgar error, and was rebuked accordingly."

Besides the exercise of the mind, painting exercises the body. It is a mechanical as well as a liberal art. To do any thing, to dig a hole in the ground, to plant a cabbage, to hit a mark, to move a shuttle, to work a pattern,—in a word, to attempt to produce any effect, and to *succeed*, has something in it that gratifies the love of power, and carries off the restless activity of the mind of man. Indolence is a delightful but distressing state: we must be doing something to be happy. Action is no less necessary than thought to the instinctive tendencies of the human frame; and painting combines them both incessantly.* The hand furnishes a practical test of the correctness of the eye; and the eye thus admonished, imposes fresh tasks of skill and industry upon the hand. Every stroke tells, as the verifying of a new truth; and every new observation, the instant it is made, passes into an act and emanation of the will. Every step is nearer what we wish, and yet there is always more to do. In spite of the facility, the fluttering grace, the evanescent hues, that play round the pencil of Rubens and Vandyke, however I may admire, I do not envy them this power so much as I do the slow, patient, laborious execution of Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci, and Andrea del Sarto, where every touch appears conscious of its charge, emulous of truth, and where the painful artist has so distinctly wrought,

“That you might almost say his picture thought!”

* The famous Schiller used to say, that he found the great happiness of life, after all, to consist in the discharge of some mechanical duty.

In the one case, the colours seem breathed on the canvas as by magic, the work and the wonder of a moment : in the other, they seem inlaid in the body of the work, and as if it took the artist years of unremitting labour, and of delightful never-ending progress to perfection.* Who would wish ever to come to the close of such works, not to dwell on them, to return to them, to be wedded to them to the last ? Rubens, with his florid, rapid style, complained that when he had just learned his art, he should be forced to die. Leonardo, in the slow advances of his, had lived long enough !

Painting is not, like writing, what is properly understood by a sedentary employment. It requires not indeed a strong, but a continued and steady exertion of muscular power. The precision and delicacy of the manual operation makes up for the want of vehemence, —as to balance himself for any time in the same position the rope-dancer must strain every nerve. Painting for a whole morning gives one as excellent an appetite for one's dinner, as old Abraham Tucker acquired for his by riding over Banstead Downs. It is related of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that " he took no other exercise than what he used in his painting-room," —the writer means, in walking backwards and forwards to look at his picture ; but the act of painting itself, of laying on the colours in the proper place, and proper quantity, was a much harder exercise than this alternate receding from and returning to the picture. This last would be

* The rich *impasting* of Titian and Giorgione combines something of the advantages of both these styles, the felicity of the one with the carefulness of the other, and is perhaps to be preferred to either.

rather a relaxation and relief than an effort. It is not to be wondered at, that an artist like Sir Joshua, who delighted so much in the sensual and practical part of his art, should have found himself at a considerable loss when the decay of his sight precluded him, for the last year or two of his life, from the following up of his profession,—“the source,” according to his own remark, “of thirty years uninterrupted enjoyment and prosperity to him.” It is only those who never think at all, or else who have accustomed themselves to brood incessantly on abstract ideas, that never feel *ennui*.

To give one instance more, and then I will have done with this rambling discourse. One of my first attempts was a picture of my father, who was then in a green old age, with strong-marked features, and scarred with the small-pox. I drew it with a broad light crossing the face, looking down, with spectacles on, reading. The book was Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics*, in a fine old binding, with Gribelin’s etchings. My father would as lieve it had been any other book; but for him to read was to be content, was “riches fineless.” The sketch promised well; and I set to work to finish it, determined to spare no time nor pains. My father was willing to sit as long as I pleased; for there is a natural desire in the mind of man to sit for one’s picture, to be the object of continued attention, to have one’s likeness multiplied; and besides his satisfaction in the picture, he had some pride in the artist, though he would rather I should have written a sermon than painted like Rembrandt or like Raphael. Those winter days, with the gleams of sun-shine coming through the chapel-windows, and cheered

by the notes of the robin-redbreast in our garden (that “ever in the haunch of winter sings”—as my afternoon’s work drew to a close,—were among the happiest of my life. When I gave the effect I intended to any part of the picture for which I had prepared my colours, when I imitated the roughness of the skin by a lucky stroke of the pencil, when I hit the clear pearly tone of a vein, which I gave the ruddy complexion of health, the blood circulating under the broad shadows of one side of the face, I thought my fortune made ; or rather it was already more than made, in my fancying that I might one day be able to say with Correggio, “ *I also am a painter !* ” It was an idle thought, a boy’s conceit ; but it did not make me less happy at the time. I used regularly to set my work in the chair to look at it through the long evenings ; and many a time did I return to take leave of it before I could go to bed at night. I remember sending it with a throbbing heart to the Exhibition, and seeing it hung up there by the side of one of the Honourable Mr. Skeffington (now Sir George). There was nothing in common between them, but that they were the portraits of two very good-natured men. I think, but am not sure, that I finished this portrait (or another afterwards) on the same day that the news of the battle of Austerlitz came ; I walked out in the afternoon, and, as I returned, saw the evening star set over a poor man’s cottage with other thoughts and feelings than I shall ever have again. Oh for the revolution of the great Platonic year, that those times might come over again ! I could sleep out the three hundred and sixty-five thousand intervening years very contentedly ! The picture is left :

the table, the chair, the window where I learned to construe Livy, the chapel where my father preached, remain where they were ; but he himself is gone to rest, full of years, of faith, of hope, and charity !

The London Magazine, December 1820.
Table Talk, 1821.

ON A LANDSCAPE OF NICOLAS POUSSIN

“ And blind Orion hungry for the morn.”

ORION, the subject of this landscape, was the classical Nimrod ; and is called by Homer, “ a hunter of shadows, himself a shade.” He was the son of Neptune ; and having lost an eye in some affray between the Gods and men, was told that if he would go to meet the rising sun, he would recover his sight. He is represented setting out on his journey, with men on his shoulders to guide him, a bow in his hand, and Diana in the clouds greeting him. He stalks along, a giant upon earth, and reels and falters in his gait, as if just awaked out of sleep, or uncertain of his way ;—you see his blindness, though his back is turned. Mists rise around him, and veil the sides of the green forests ; earth is dank and fresh with dews, the “ grey dawn and the Pleiades before him dance,” and in the distance are seen the blue hills and sullen ocean. Nothing was ever more finely conceived or done. It breathes the spirit of the morning ; its moisture, its repose, its obscurity, waiting the miracle of light to kindle it into smiles : the whole is, like the principal figure in it, “ a forerunner of the dawn.” The same atmosphere tinges and imbues every object, the same dull light

“ shadowy sets off ” the face of nature : one feeling of vastness, of strangeness, and of primeval forms pervades the painter’s canvas, and we are thrown back upon the first integrity of things. This great and learned man might be said to see nature through the glass of time : he alone has a right to be considered as the painter of classical antiquity. Sir Joshua has done him justice in this respect. He could give to the scenery of his heroic fables that unimpaired look of original nature, full, solid, large, luxuriant, teeming with life and power ; or deck it with all the pomp of art, with temples and towers, and mythologic groves. His pictures “ denote a foregone conclusion.” He applies nature to his purposes, works out her images according to the standard of his thoughts, embodies high fictions ; and the first conception being given, all the rest seems to grow out of, and be assimilated to it, by the unfailing process of a studious imagination. Like his own Orion, he overlooks the surrounding scene, appears to “ take up the isles as a very little thing, and to lay the earth in a balance.” With a laborious and mighty grasp, he put nature into the mould of the ideal and antique ; and was among painters (more than any one else) what Milton was among poets. There is in both something of the same pedantry, the same stiffness, the same elevation, the same grandeur, the same mixture of art and nature, the same richness of borrowed materials, the same unity of character. Neither the poet nor the painter lowered the subjects they treated, but filled up the outline in the fancy, and added strength and reality to it ; and thus not only satisfied, but surpassed the expectations of the spectator and the reader. This

is held for the triumph and the perfection of works of art. To give us nature, such as we see it, is well and deserving of praise ; to give us nature, such as we have never seen, but have often wished to see it, is better, and deserving of higher praise. He who can show the world in its first naked glory, with the hues of fancy spread over it, or in its high and palmy state, with the gravity of history stamped on the proud monuments of vanished empire,—who, by his “so potent art,” can recal time past, transport us to distant places, and join the regions of imagination (a new conquest) to those of reality,—who shows us not only what nature is, but what she has been, and is capable of,—he who does this, and does it with simplicity, with truth, and grandeur, is lord of nature and her powers ; and his mind is universal, and his art the master-art !

There is nothing in this “more than natural,” if criticism could be persuaded to think so. The historic painter does not neglect or contravene nature, but follows her more closely up into her fantastic heights, or hidden recesses. He demonstrates what she would be in conceivable circumstances, and under implied conditions. He “gives to airy nothing a local habitation,” not “a name.” At his touch, words start up into images, thoughts become things. He clothes a dream, a phantom with form and colour and the wholesome attributes of reality. *His* art is a second nature ; not a different one. There are those, indeed, who think that not to copy nature, is the rule for attaining perfection. Because they cannot paint the objects which they have seen, they fancy themselves qualified to paint the ideas which they

have not seen. But it is possible to fail in this latter and more difficult style of imitation, as well as in the former humbler one. The detection, it is true, is not so easy, because the objects are not so nigh at hand to compare, and therefore there is more room both for false pretension and for self-deceit. They take an epic motto or subject, and conclude that the spirit is implied as a thing of course. They paint inferior portraits, maudlin lifeless faces, without ordinary expression, or one look, feature, or particle of nature in them, and think that this is to rise to the truth of history. They vulgarise and degrade whatever is interesting or sacred to the mind, and suppose that they thus add to the dignity of their profession. They represent a face that seems as if no thought or feeling of any kind had ever passed through it, and would have you believe that this is the very sublime of expression, such as it would appear in heroes, or demi-gods of old, when rapture or agony was raised to its height. They show you a landscape that looks as if the sun never shone upon it, and tell you that it is not modern—that so earth looked when Titan first kissed it with his rays. This is not the true *ideal*. It is not to fill the moulds of the imagination, but to deface and injure them: it is not to come up to, but to fall short of the poorest conception in the public mind. Such pictures should not be hung in the same room with that of Orion.*

* Every thing tends to show the manner in which a great artist is formed. If any person could claim an exemption from the careful imitation of individual objects, it was Nicolas Poussin. He studied the antique, but he also studied nature. "I have often admired," says Vignuel de Marville, who knew him at a late period of his life, " the

Poussin was, of all painters, the most poetical. He was the painter of ideas. No one ever told a story half so well, nor so well knew what was capable of being told by the pencil. He seized on, and struck off with grace and precision, just that point of view which would be likely to catch the reader's fancy. There is a significance, a consciousness in whatever he does (sometimes a vice, but oftener a virtue) beyond any other painter. His Giants sitting on the tops of craggy mountains, as huge themselves, and playing idly on their Pan's-pipes, seem to have been seated there these three thousand years, and to know the beginning and the end of their own story. An infant Bacchus or Jupiter is big with his future destiny. Even inanimate and dumb things speak a language of their own. His snakes, the messengers of fate, are inspired with human intellect. His trees grow

love he had for his art. 'Old as he was, I frequently saw him among the ruins of ancient Rome, out in the Campagna, or along the banks of the Tyber, sketching a scene that had pleased him ; and I often met him with his handkerchief full of stones, moss, or flowers, which he carried home, that he might copy them exactly from nature. One day I asked him how he had attained to such a degree of perfection, as to have gained so high a rank among the great painters of Italy ? He answered, *I HAVE NEGLECTED NOTHING.*"—See his *Life lately published*. It appears from this account that he had not fallen into a recent error, that Nature puts the man of genius out. As a contrast to the foregoing description I might mention, that I remember an old gentleman once asking Mr. West in the British Gallery, if he had ever been at Athens ? To which the President made answer, No ; nor did he feel any great desire to go ; for that he thought he had as good an idea of the place from the Catalogue, as he could get by living there for any number of years. What would he have said, if any one had told him, he could get as good an idea of the subject of one of his great works from reading the Catalogue of it, as from seeing the picture itself ! Yet the answer was characteristic of the genius of the painter.

and expand their leaves in the air, glad of the rain, proud of the sun, awake to the winds of heaven. In his Plague of Athens, the very buildings seem stiff with horror. His picture of the Deluge is, perhaps, the finest historical landscape in the world. You see a waste of waters, wide interminable: the sun is labouring, wan and weary up the sky; the clouds, dull and leaden, like a load upon the eye, and heaven and earth seem commingling into one confused mass! His human figures are sometimes "o'er-informed" with this kind of feeling. Their actions have too much gesticulation, and the set expression of the features borders too much on the mechanical and caricatured style. In this respect, they form a contrast to Raphael's, whose figures never appear to be sitting for their pictures, or to be conscious of a spectator, or to have come from the painter's hand. In Nicolas Poussin, on the contrary, every thing seems to have a distinct understanding with the artist: "the very stones prate of their whereabout:" each object has its part and place assigned, and is in a sort of compact with the rest of the picture. It is this conscious keeping, and, as it were, *internal* design, that gives their peculiar character to the works of this artist. There was a picture of Aurora in the British Gallery a year or two ago. It was a suffusion of golden light. The Goddess wore her saffron-coloured robes, and appeared just risen from the gloomy bed of old Tithonus. Her very steeds, milk-white, were tinged with the yellow dawn. It was a personification of the morning.—Poussin succeeded better in classic than in sacred subjects. The latter are comparatively heavy, forced, full of violent contrasts.

of colour, of red, blue, and black, and without the true prophetic inspiration of the characters. But in his Pagan allegories and fables he was quite at home. The native gravity and native levity of the Frenchman were combined with Italian scenery and an antique gusto, and gave even to his colouring an air of learned indifference. He wants, in one respect, grace, form, expression ; but he has every where sense and meaning, perfect costume and propriety. His personages always belong to the class and time represented, and are strictly versed in the business in hand. His grotesque compositions in particular, his Nymphs and Fauns, are superior (at least, as far as style is concerned) even to those of Rubens. They are taken more immediately out of fabulous history. Rubens's Satyrs and Bacchantes have a more jovial and voluptuous aspect, are more drunk with pleasure, more full of animal spirits and riotous impulses ; they laugh and bound along—

Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring :

but those of Poussin have more of the intellectual part of the character, and seem vicious on reflection, and of set purpose. Rubens's are noble specimens of a class ; Poussin's are allegorical abstractions of the same class, with bodies less pampered, but with minds more secretly depraved. The Bacchanalian groups of the Flemish painter were, however, his masterpieces in composition. Witness those prodigies of colour, character, and expression, at Blenheim. In the more chaste and refined delineation of classic fable, Poussin was without a rival. Rubens, who was a match for him in the wild and

picturesque, could not pretend to vie with the elegance and purity of thought in his picture of Apollo giving a poet a cup of water to drink, nor with the gracefulness of design in the figure of a nymph squeezing the juice of a bunch of grapes from her fingers (a rosy wine-press) which falls into the mouth of a chubby infant below. But, above all, who shall celebrate, in terms of fit praise, his picture of the shepherds in the Vale of Tempe going out in a fine morning of the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription :—ET I EGO IN ARCADIA VIXI ! The eager curiosity of some, the expression of others who start back with fear and surprise, the clear breeze playing with the branches of the shadowing trees, “ the valleys low, where the mild zephyrs use,” the distant, uninterrupted, sunny prospect speak (and for ever will speak on) of ages past to ages yet to come ! *

Pictures are a set of chosen images, a stream of pleasant thoughts passing through the mind. It is a luxury to have the walls of our rooms hung round with them, and no less so to have such a gallery in the mind, to cover the relics of ancient art bound up “ within the book and volume of the brain, unmixed (if it were possible) with baser matter ! ” A life passed among pictures, in the study and the love of art, is a happy noiseless dream : or rather, it is to dream and to be awake at the same time ; for it has all “ the sober certainty of waking

* Poussin has repeated this subject more than once, and appears to have revelled in its witcheries. I have before alluded to it, and may again. It is hard that we should not be allowed to dwell as often as we please on what delights us, when things that are disagreeable recur so often against our will.

bliss," with the romantic voluptuousness of a visionary and abstracted being. They are the bright consummate essences of things, and " he who knows of these delights to taste and interpose them oft, is not unwise ! "—The Orion, which I have here taken occasion to descant upon, is one of a collection of excellent pictures, as this collection is itself one of a series from the old masters, which have for some years back embrowned the walls of the British Gallery, and enriched the public eye. What hues (those of nature mellowed by time) breathe around, as we enter ! What forms are there, woven into the memory ! What looks, which only the answering looks of the spectator can express ! What intellectual stores have been yearly poured forth from the shrine of ancient art ! The works are various, but the names the same—heaps of Rembrandts frowning from the darkened walls, Rubens's glad gorgeous groups. Titians more rich and rare, Claudes always exquisite, sometimes beyond compare, Guido's endless cloying sweetness, the learning of Poussin and the Caracci, and Raphael's princely magnificence, crowning all. We read certain letters and syllables in the catalogue, and at the well-known magic sound, a miracle of skill and beauty starts to view. One might think that one year's prodigal display of such perfection would exhaust the labours of one man's life ; but the next year, and the next to that, we find another harvest reaped and gathered in to the great garner of art, by the same immortal hands—

Old GENIUS the porter of them was ;
He letteth in, he letteth out to wend.—

Their works seem endless as their reputation—to be many as they are complete—to multiply with the desire of the mind to see more and more of them ; as if there were a living power in the breath of Fame, and in the very names of the great heirs of glory “ there were propagation too ! ” It is something to have a collection of this sort to count upon once a year ; to have one last, lingering look yet to come. Pictures are scattered like stray gifts through the world ; and while they remain, earth has yet a little gilding left, not quite rubbed off, dishonoured, and defaced. There are plenty of standard works still to be found in this country, in the collections at Blenheim, at Burleigh, and in those belonging to Mr. Angerstein, Lord Grosvenor, the Marquis of Stafford, and others, to keep up this treat to the lovers of art for many years : and it is the more desirable to reserve a privileged sanctuary of this sort, where the eye may dote, and the heart take its fill of such pictures as Poussin’s Orion, since the Louvre is stripped of its triumphant spoils, and since he, who collected it, and wore it as a rich jewel in his Iron Crown, the hunter of greatness and of glory, is himself a shade !—

The London Magazine, August 1821.

Table Talk, Vol. II., 1822.

ON FAMILIAR STYLE

IT is not easy to write a familiar style. Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style, and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random. On the contrary, there is nothing that requires more precision, and, if I may so say, purity of expression, than the style I am speaking of. It utterly rejects not only all unmeaning pomp, but all low, cant phrases, and loose, unconnected, *slipshod* allusions. It is not to take the first word that offers, but the best word in common use ; it is not to throw words together in any combinations we please, but to follow and avail ourselves of the true idiom of the language. To write a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes. Or to give another illustration, to write naturally is the same thing in regard to common conversation, as to read naturally is in regard to common speech. It does not follow that it is an easy thing to give the true accent and inflection to the words you utter, because you do not attempt to rise above the level of ordinary life and colloquial speaking. You do not assume indeed the solemnity of the pulpit, or the tone of stage-declamation ; neither are you at liberty to

gabble on at a venture, without emphasis or discretion, or to resort to vulgar dialect or clownish pronunciation. You must steer a middle course. You are tied down to a given and appropriate articulation, which is determined by the habitual associations between sense and sound, and which you can only hit by entering into the author's meaning, as you must find the proper words and style to express yourself by fixing your thoughts on the subject you have to write about. Any one may mouth out a passage with a theatrical cadence, or get upon stilts to tell his thoughts : but to write or speak with propriety and simplicity is a more difficult task. Thus it is easy to affect a pompous style, to use a word twice as big as the thing you want to express : it is not so easy to pitch upon the very word that exactly fits it. Out of eight or ten words equally common, equally intelligible, with nearly equal pretensions, it is a matter of some nicety and discrimination to pick out the very one, the preferableness of which is scarcely perceptible, but decisive. The reason why I object to Dr. Johnson's style is, that there is no discrimination, no selection, no variety in it. He uses none but " tall, opaque words," taken from the " first row of the rubric " ;—words with the greatest number of syllables, or Latin phrases with merely English terminations. If a fine style depended on this sort of arbitrary pretension, it would be fair to judge of an author's elegance by the measurement of his words, and the substitution of foreign circumlocutions (with no precise associations) for the mother tongue.* How

* I have heard of such a thing as an author, who makes it a rule never to admit a monosyllable into his vapid verse. Yet the charm and sweet-

simple it is to be dignified without ease, to be pompous without meaning ! Surely, it is but a mechanical rule for avoiding what is low to be always pedantic and affected. It is clear you cannot use a vulgar English word, if you never use a common English word at all. A fine tact is shewn in adhering to those which are perfectly common, and yet never falling into any expressions which are debased by disgusting circumstances, or which owe their signification and point to technical or professional allusions. A truly natural or familiar style can never be quaint or vulgar, for this reason, that it is of universal force and applicability, and that quaintness and vulgarity arise out of the immediate connection of certain words with coarse and disagreeable, or with confined ideas. The last form what we understand by *cant* or *slang* phrases.—To give an example of what is not very clear in the general statement. I should say that the phrase *To cut with a knife*, or *To cut a piece of wood*, is perfectly free from vulgarity, because it is perfectly common : but to *cut an acquaintance* is not quite unexceptionable, because it is not perfectly common or intelligible, and has barely yet escaped out of the limits of slang phraseology. I should hardly therefore use the word in this sense without putting it in italics as a license of expression, to be received *cum grano salis*. All provincial or bye-phrases come under the same mark of reprobation—all such as the writer transfers to the page from his fire-side or a particular *coterie*, or that he invents for his own sole use and convenience. I conceive ness of Marlow's lines depended often on their being made up almost entirely of monosyllables.

that words are like money, not the worse for being common, but that it is the stamp of custom alone that gives them circulation or value. I am fastidious in this respect, and would almost as soon coin the currency of the realm as counterfeit the King's English. I never invented or gave a new and unauthorised meaning to any word but one single one (the term *impersonal* applied to feelings) and that was in an abstruse metaphysical discussion to express a very difficult distinction. I have been (I know) loudly accused of revelling in vulgarisms and broken English. I cannot speak to that point: but so far I plead guilty to the determined use of acknowledged idioms and common elliptical expressions. I am not sure that the critics in question know the one from the other, that is, can distinguish any medium between formal pedantry and the most barbarous solecism. As an author, I endeavour to employ plain words and popular modes of construction, as were I a chapman and dealer, I should common weights and measures.

The proper force of words lies not in the words themselves, but in their application. A word may be a fine-sounding word, of an unusual length, and very imposing from its learning and novelty, and yet in the connection in which it is introduced, may be quite pointless and irrelevant. It is not pomp or pretension, but the adaptation of the expression to the idea that clenches a writer's meaning:—as it is not the size or glossiness of the materials, but their being fitted each to its place, that gives strength to the arch; or as the pegs and nails are as necessary to the support of the building as the

larger timbers, and more so than the mere shewy, unsubstantial ornaments. I hate any thing that occupies more space than it is worth. I hate to see a load of band-boxes go along the street, and I hate to see a parcel of big words without any thing in them. A person who does not deliberately dispose of all his thoughts alike in cumbrous draperies and flimsy disguises, may strike out twenty varieties of familiar everyday language, each coming somewhat nearer to the feeling he wants to convey, and at last not hit upon that particular and only one, which may be said to be identical with the exact impression in his mind. This would seem to shew that Mr. Cobbett is hardly right in saying that the first word that occurs is always the best. It may be a very good one ; and yet a better may present itself on reflection or from time to time. It should be suggested naturally, however, and spontaneously, from a fresh and lively conception of the subject. We seldom succeed by trying at improvement, or by merely substituting one word for another that we are not satisfied with, as we cannot recollect the name of a place or person by merely plaguing ourselves about it. We wander farther from the point by persisting in a wrong scent ; but it starts up accidentally in the memory when we least expected it, by touching some link in the chain of previous association.

There are those who hoard up and make a cautious display of nothing but rich and rare phraseology ;—ancient medals, obscure coins, and Spanish pieces of eight. They are very curious to inspect ; but I myself would neither offer nor take them in the course of

exchange. A sprinkling of archaisms is not amiss; but a tissue of obsolete expressions is more fit for *keep than wear*. I do not say I would not use any phrase that had been brought into fashion before the middle or the end of the last century; but I should be shy of using any that had not been employed by any approved author during the whole of that time. Words, like clothes, get old-fashioned, or mean and ridiculous, when they have been for some time laid aside. Mr. Lamb is the only imitator of old English style I can read with pleasure; and he is so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his authors, that the idea of imitation is almost done away. There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein both in the thought and feeling, an intuition, deep and lively, of his subject, that carries off any quaintness or awkwardness arising from an antiquated style and dress. The matter is completely his own, though the manner is assumed. Perhaps his ideas are altogether so marked and individual, as to require their point and pungency to be neutralised by the affectation of a singular but traditional form of conveyance. Tricked out in the prevailing costume, they would probably seem more startling and out of the way. The old English authors, Burton, Fuller, Coryate, Sir Thomas Brown, are a kind of mediators between us and the more eccentric and whimsical modern, reconciling us to his peculiarities. I do not however know how far this is the case or not, till he condescends to write like one of us. I must confess that what I like best of his papers under the signature of Elia (still I do not presume, amidst such excellence, to decide what is most excellent) is the account of *Mrs.*

Battle's Opinions on Whist, which is also the most free from obsolete allusions and turns of expression—

“ A well of native English undefiled.”

To those acquainted with his admired prototypes, these Essays of the ingenious and highly gifted author have the same sort of charm and relish, that Erasmus's *Colloquies* or a fine piece of modern Latin have to the classical scholar. Certainly, I do not know any borrowed pencil that has more power or felicity of execution than the one of which I have here been speaking.

It is as easy to write a gaudy style without ideas, as it is to spread a pallet of shewy colours, or to smear in a flaunting transparency. “ What do you read ? ”—“ Words, words, words.”—“ What is the matter ? ”—“ *Nothing*, ” it might be answered. The florid style is the reverse of the familiar. The last is employed as an unvarnished medium to convey ideas ; the first is resorted to as a spangled veil to conceal the want of them. When there is nothing to be set down but words, it costs little to have them fine. Look through the dictionary, and cull out a *florilegium*, rival the *tulippomania*. *Rouge* high enough, and never mind the natural complexion. The vulgar, who are not in the secret, will admire the look of preternatural health and vigour ; and the fashionable, who regard only appearances, will be delighted with the imposition. Keep to your sounding generalities, your tinkling phrases, and all will be well. Swell out an unmeaning truism to a perfect tympany of style. A thought, a distinction is the rock on which

all this brittle cargo of verbiage splits at once. Such writers have merely *verbal* imaginations, that retain nothing but words. Or their puny thoughts have dragon-wings, all green and gold. They soar far above the vulgar failing of the *Sermo humi obrepens*—their most ordinary speech is never short of an hyperbole, splendid, imposing, vague, incomprehensible, magniloquent, a cento of sounding common-places. If some of us, whose “ambition is more lowly,” pry a little too narrowly into nooks and corners to pick up a number of “unconsidered trifles,” they never once direct their eyes or lift their hands to seize on any but the most gorgeous, tarnished, thread-bare patch-work set of phrases, the left-off finery of poetic extravagance, transmitted down through successive generations of barren pretenders. If they criticise actors and actresses, a huddled phantasmagoria of feathers, spangles, floods of light, and oceans of sound float before their morbid sense, which they paint in the style of Ancient Pistol. Not a glimpse can you get of the merits or defects of the performers: they are hidden in a profusion of barbarous epithets and wilful rhodomontade. Our hypercritics are not thinking of these little fantoccini beings—

“ That strut and fret their hour upon the stage”—

but of tall phantoms of words, abstractions, *genera* and *species*, sweeping clauses, periods that unite the Poles, forced alliterations, astounding antitheses—

“ And on their pens *Fustian* sits plumed.”

If they describe kings and queens, it is an Eastern pageant. The Coronation at either House is nothing to it. We get at four repeated images—a curtain, a throne, a sceptre, and a foot-stool. These are with them the wardrobe of a lofty imagination ; and they turn their servile strains to servile uses. Do we read a description of pictures ? It is not a reflection of tones and hues which “ nature’s own sweet and cunning hand laid on,” but piles of precious stones, rubies, pearls, emeralds, Golconda’s mines, and all the blazonry of art. Such persons are in fact besotted with words, and their brains are turned with the glittering, but empty and sterile phantoms of things. Personifications, capital letters, seas of sunbeams, visions of glory, shining inscriptions, the figures of a transparency, Britannia with her shield, or Hope leaning on an anchor, make up their stock in trade. They may be considered as *hieroglyphical* writers. Images stand out in their minds isolated and important merely in themselves, without any ground-work of feeling—there is no context in their imaginations. Words affect them in the same way, by the mere sound, that is, by their possible, not by their actual application to the subject in hand. They are fascinated by first appearances, and have no sense of consequences. Nothing more is meant by them than meets the ear : they understand or feel nothing more than meets their eye. The web and texture of the universe, and of the heart of man, is a mystery to them : they have no faculty that strikes a chord in unison with it. They cannot get beyond the daubings of fancy, the varnish of sentiment. Objects are not linked to feelings, words to things, but

images revolve in splendid mockery, words represent themselves in their strange rhapsodies. The categories of such a mind are pride and ignorance—pride in outside show, to which they sacrifice every thing, and ignorance of the true worth and hidden structure both of words and things. With a sovereign contempt for what is familiar and natural, they are the slaves of vulgar affectation—of a routine of high-flown phrases. Scorning to imitate realities, they are unable to invent any thing, to strike out one original idea. They are not copyists of nature, it is true: but they are the poorest of all plagiarists, the plagiarists of words. All is far-fetched, dear-bought, artificial, oriental in subject and allusion: all is mechanical, conventional, vapid, formal, pedantic in style and execution. They startle and confound the understanding of the reader, by the remoteness and obscurity of their illustrations: they soothe the ear by the monotony of the same everlasting round of circuitous metaphors. They are the *mock-school* in poetry and prose. They flounder about between fustian in expression, and bathos in sentiment. They tantalise the fancy, but never reach the head nor touch the heart. Their Temple of Fame is like a shadowy structure raised by Dulness to Vanity, or like Cowper's description of the Empress of Russia's palace of ice, as "worthless as in shew 'twas glittering"—

" It smiled, and it was cold ! "

Table Talk, Vol. II., 1822.

A FAREWELL TO ESSAY-WRITING

“ This life is best, if quiet life is best.”

FOOD, warmth, sleep, and a book ; these are all I at present ask—the *ultima Thule* of my wandering desires. Do you not then wish for

“ A friend in your retreat,
Whom you may whisper, solitude is sweet ? ”

Expected, well enough :—gone, still better. Such attractions are strengthened by distance. Nor a mistress ? “ Beautiful mask ! I know thee ! ” When I can judge of the heart from the face, of the thoughts from the lips, I may again trust myself. Instead of these give me the robin red-breast, pecking the crumbs at the door, or warbling on the leafless spray, the same glancing form that has followed me wherever I have been, and “ done its spiriting gently ” ; or the rich notes of the thrush that startle the ear of winter, and seem to have drunk up the full draught of joy from the very sense of contrast. To these I adhere, and am faithful, for they are true to me ; and, dear in themselves, are dearer for the sake of what is departed, leading me back (by the hand) to that dreaming world, in the innocence of which they sat and made sweet music, waking the

promise of future years, and answered by the eager throb-bings of my own breast. But now “ the credulous hope of mutual minds is o'er,” and I turn back from the world that has deceived me, to nature that lent it a false beauty, and that keeps up the illusion of the past. As I quaff my libations of tea in a morning, I love to watch the clouds sailing from the west, and fancy that “ the spring comes slowly up this way.” In this hope, while “ fields are dank and ways are mire,” I follow the same direction to a neighbouring wood, where, having gained the dry, level greensward, I can see my way for a mile before me, closed in on each side by copse-wood, and ending in a point of light more or less brilliant, as the day is bright or cloudy. What a walk is this to me ! I have no need of book or companion—the days, the hours, the thoughts of my youth are at my side, and blend with the air that fans my cheek. Here I can saunter for hours, bending my eye forward, stopping and turning to look back, thinking to strike off into some less trodden path, yet hesitating to quit the one I am in, afraid to snap the brittle threads of memory. I remark the shining trunks and slender branches of the birch trees, waving in the idle breeze ; or a pheasant springs up on whirring wing ; or I recall the spot where I once found a wood-pigeon at the foot of a tree, weltering in its gore, and think how many seasons have flown since “ it left its little life in air.” Dates, names, faces come back—to what purpose ? Or why think of them now ? Or rather why not think of them oftener ? We walk through life, as through a narrow path, with a thin curtain drawn around it ; behind are ranged rich portraits, airy harps

are strung—yet we will not stretch forth our hands and lift aside the veil, to catch glimpses of the one, or sweep the chords of the other. As in a theatre, when the old-fashioned green curtain drew up, groups of figures, fantastic dresses, laughing faces, rich banquets, stately columns, gleaming vistas appeared beyond; so we have only at any time to “peep through the blanket of the past,” to possess ourselves at once of all that has regaled our senses, that is stored up in our memory, that has struck our fancy, that has pierced our hearts:—yet to all this we are indifferent, insensible, and seem intent only on the present vexation, the future disappointment. If there is a Titian hanging up in the room with me, I scarcely regard it: how then should I be expected to strain the mental eye so far, or to throw down, by the magic spells of the will, the stone walls that enclose it in the Louvre? There is one head there of which I have often thought, when looking at it, that nothing should ever disturb me again, and I would become the character it represents—such perfect calmness and self-possession reigns in it! Why do I not hang an image of this in some dusky corner of my brain, and turn an eye upon it ever and anon, as I have need of some such talisman to calm my troubled thoughts? The attempt is fruitless, if not natural; or, like that of the French, to hang garlands on the grave, and to conjure back the dead by miniature pictures of them while living! It is only some actual coincidence or local association that tends, without violence, to “open all the cells where memory slept.” I can easily, by stooping over the long-sprent grass and clay cold clod, recall the tufts of primroses, or purple

hyacinths, that formerly grew on the same spot, and cover the bushes with leaves and singing-birds, as they were eighteen summers ago ; or prolonging my walk and hearing the sighing gale rustle through a tall, straight wood at the end of it, can fancy that I distinguish the cry of hounds, and the fatal group issuing from it, as in the tale of Theodore and Honoria. A moaning gust of wind aids the belief ; I look once more to see whether the trees before me answer to the idea of the horror-stricken grove, and an' air-built city towers over their grey tops.

“ Of all the cities in Romanian lands,
The chief and most renown'd Ravenna stands.” *

I return home resolved to read the entire poem through, and, after dinner, drawing my chair to the fire, and holding a small print close to my eyes, launch into the full tide of Dryden's couplets (a stream of sound), comparing his didactic and descriptive pomp with the simple pathos and picturesque truth of Boccaccio's story, and tasting with a pleasure, which none but an habitual reader can feel, some quaint examples of pronunciation in this accomplished versifier.

“ Which when Honoria view'd,
The fresh *impulse* her former fright renew'd.” †

“ And made th' *insult*, which in his grief appears,
The means to mourn thee with my pious tears.” ‡

* Dryden's *Theodore and Honoria*, princip.

‡ Dryden's *Sigismonda and Guiscardo*.

† *Ibid.*

These trifling instances of the wavering and unsettled state of the language give double effect to the firm and stately march of the verse, and make me dwell with a sort of tender interest on the difficulties and doubts of an earlier period of literature. They pronounced words then in a manner which we should laugh at now ; and they wrote verse in a manner which we can do anything but laugh at. The pride of a new acquisition seems to give fresh confidence to it ; to impel the rolling syllables through the moulds provided for them, and to overflow the envious bounds of rhyme into time-honoured triplets.

What sometimes surprises me in looking back to the past, is, with the exception already stated, to find myself so little changed in the time. The same images and trains of thought stick by me : I have the same tastes, likings, sentiments, and wishes that I had then. One great ground of confidence and support has, indeed, been struck from under my feet ; but I have made it up to myself by proportionable pertinacity of opinion. The success of the great cause, to which I had vowed myself, was to me more than all the world : I had a strength in its strength, a resource which I knew not of, till it failed me for the second time.

“ Fall’n was Glenartny’s stately tree !
Oh ! ne’er to see Lord Ronald more ! ”

It was not till I saw the axe laid to the root, that I found the full extent of what I had to lose and suffer. But my conviction of the right was only established by the triumph of the wrong ; and my earliest hopes will be my last regrets. One source of this unbendingness

(which some may call obstinacy), is that, though living much alone, I have never worshipped the Echo. I see plainly enough that black is not white, that the grass is green, that kings are not their subjects ; and, in such self-evident cases, do not think it necessary to collate my opinions with the received prejudices. In subtler questions, and matters that admit of doubt, as I do not impose my opinion on others without a reason, so I will not give up mine to them without a better reason ; and a person calling me names, or giving himself airs of authority, does not convince me of his having taken more pains to find out the truth than I have, but the contrary. Mr. Gifford once said, that “ while I was sitting over my gin and tobacco-pipes, I fancied myself a Leibnitz.” He did not so much as know that I had ever read a metaphysical book :—was I therefore, out of complaisance or deference to him, to forget whether I had or not ? Leigh Hunt is puzzled to reconcile the shyness of my pretensions with the inveteracy and sturdiness of my principles. I should have thought they were nearly the same thing. Both from disposition and habit, I can *assume* nothing in word, look, or manner. I cannot steal a march upon public opinion in any way. My standing upright, speaking loud, entering a room gracefully, proves nothing ; therefore I neglect these ordinary means of recommending myself to the good graces and admiration of strangers (and, as it appears, even of philosophers and friends). Why ? Because I have other resources, or, at least, am absorbed in other studies and pursuits. Suppose this absorption to be extreme, and even morbid—that I have brooded over

an idea till it has become a kind of substance in my brain, that I have reasons for a thing which I have found out with much labour and pains, and to which I can scarcely do justice without the utmost violence of exertion (and that only to a few persons)—is this a reason for my playing off my out-of-the-way notions in all companies, wearing a prim and self-complacent air, as if I were “the admired of all observers”? or is it not rather an argument (together with a want of animal spirits), why I should retire into myself, and perhaps acquire a nervous and uneasy look, from a consciousness of the disproportion between the interest and conviction I feel on certain subjects, and my ability to communicate what weighs upon my own mind to others? If my ideas, which I do not avouch, but suppose, lie below the surface, why am I to be always attempting to dazzle superficial people with them, or smiling, delighted, at my own want of success?

In matters of taste and feeling, one proof that my conclusions have not been quite shallow or hasty, is the circumstance of their having been lasting. I have the same favourite books, pictures, passages that I ever had: I may therefore presume that they will last me my life—nay, I may indulge a hope that my thoughts will survive me. This continuity of impression is the only thing on which I pride myself. Even Lamb, whose relish of certain things is as keen and earnest as possible, takes a surfeit of admiration, and I should be afraid to ask about his select authors or particular friends, after a lapse of ten years. As to myself, any one knows where to have me. What I have once made up my mind to,

I abide by to the end of the chapter. One cause of my independence of opinion is, I believe, the liberty I give to others, or the very diffidence and distrust of making converts. I should be an excellent man on a jury. I might say little, but should starve "the other eleven obstinate fellows" out. I remember Mr. Godwin writing to Mr. Wordsworth, that "his tragedy of *Antonio* could not fail of success." It was damned past all redemption. I said to Mr. Wordsworth that I thought this a natural consequence; for how could any one have a dramatic turn of mind who judged entirely of others from himself? Mr. Godwin might be convinced of the excellence of his work; but how could he know that others would be convinced of it, unless by supposing that they were as wise as himself, and as infallible critics of dramatic poetry—so many Aristotles sitting in judgment on Euripides! This shows why pride is connected with shyness and reserve; for the really proud have not so high an opinion of the generality as to suppose that they can understand them, or that there is any common measure between them. So Dryden exclaims of his opponents with bitter disdain—

"Nor can I think what thoughts they can conceive."

I have not sought to make partisans, still less did I dream of making enemies; and have therefore kept my opinions myself, whether they were currently adopted or not. To get others to come into our ways of thinking, we must go over to theirs; and it is necessary to follow, in order to lead. At the time I lived here formerly, I had no suspicion that I should ever become a voluminous writer; yet I had just the same confidence

in my feelings before I had ventured to air them in public as I have now. Neither the outcry *for* or *against* moves me a jot : I do not say that the one is not more agreeable than the other.

Not far from the spot where I write, I first read Chaucer's *Flower and Leaf*, and was charmed with that young beauty, shrouded in her bower, and listening with ever-fresh delight to the repeated song of the nightingale close by her—the impression of the scene, the vernal landscape, the cool of the morning, the gushing notes of the songstress,

“ And ayen methought she sung close by mine ear,”

is as vivid as if it had been of yesterday ; and nothing can persuade me that that is not a fine poem. I do not find this impression conveyed in Dryden's version, and therefore nothing can persuade me that that is as fine. I used to walk out at this time with Mr. and Miss Lamb of an evening, to look at the Claude Lorraine skies over our heads melting from azure into purple and gold, and to gather mushrooms, that sprung up at our feet, to throw into our hashed mutton at supper. I was at that time an enthusiastic admirer of Claude, and could dwell for ever on one or two of the finest prints from him hung round my little room ; the fleecy flocks, the bending trees, the winding streams, the groves, the nodding temples, the air-wove hills, and distant sunny vales ; and tried to translate them into their lovely living hues. People then told me that Wilson was much superior to Claude : I did not believe them. Their pictures have since been seen together at the British Institution, and

all the world have come into my opinion. I have not, on that account, given it up. I will not compare our hashed mutton with Amelia's ; but it put us in mind of it, and led to a discussion, sharply seasoned and well sustained, till midnight, the result of which appeared some years after in the *Edinburgh Review*. Have I a better opinion of those criticisms on that account, or should I therefore maintain them with greater vehemence and tenaciousness ? Oh no : Both rather with less, now that they are before the public, and it is for them to make their election.

It is in looking back to such scenes that I draw my best consolation for the future. Later impressions come and go, and serve to fill up the intervals ; but these are my standing resource, my true classics. If I have had few real pleasures or advantages, my ideas, from their sinewy texture, have been to me in the nature of realities ; and if I should not be able to add to the stock, I can live by husbanding the interest. As to my speculations, there is little to admire in them but my admiration of others ; and whether they have an echo in time to come or not, I have learned to set a grateful value on the past, and am content to wind up the account of what is personal only to myself and the immediate circle of objects in which I have moved, with an act of easy oblivion,

“ And curtain-close such scene from every future view.”

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